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## Social Inclusion beyond Borders : Utilization of Migrant Capital in Transnational and Diaspora Communities

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## **Social Inclusion beyond Borders: Utilization of Migrant Capital in Transnational and Diaspora Communities**

Editors

Sanna Saksela-Bergholm, Mari Toivanen and Östen Wahlbeck

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## Table of Contents

<b>Migrant Capital as a Resource for Migrant Communities</b> Sanna Saksela-Bergholm, Mari Toivanen and Östen Wahlbeck	164–170
<b>Nordic Ties and British Lives? Migrant Capital and the Case of Nordic Migrants Living in London</b> Saara Koikkalainen	171–180
<b>The Utilisation of Migrant Capital to Access the Labour Market: The Case of Swedish Migrants in Helsinki</b> Östen Wahlbeck and Sabina Fortelius	181–189
<b>Locating Forced Migrants' Resources: Residency Status and the Process of Family Reunification in Finland</b> Johanna Hiitola	190–199
<b>Syrian Refugee Entrepreneurship in Turkey: Integration and the Use of Immigrant Capital in the Informal Economy</b> Reyhan Atasü-Topcuoğlu	200–210
<b>Transnational Practices and Migrant Capital: The Case of Filipino Women in Iceland</b> Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir	211–220
<b>Welfare beyond Borders: Filipino Transnational Families' Informal Social Protection Strategies</b> Sanna Saksela-Bergholm	221–231
<b>Transnational Social Capital in Migration: The Example of Student Migration from Bulgaria to Germany</b> Birgit Glorius	232–242
<b>Second Generation and Migrant Capital in the Transnational Space: The Case of Young Kurds in France</b> Mari Toivanen	243–252

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Editorial

## Migrant Capital as a Resource for Migrant Communities

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### Abstract

This thematic issue explores the processes and dynamics involved in how different forms of migrant capital are employed and how these relate to processes of social inclusion. Leaning on a Bourdieusian approach, we wish to move beyond existing descriptive studies and theorise the role migration plays in the accumulation, conversion and utilisation of various forms of capital by migrant communities and their members. The articles demonstrate how migrant capital can function as a resource created by migrants during the migration process, or as an outcome of it, and are potentially available to their family members. The articles illustrate via case studies from different national contexts how transnational migrants or members of migrant communities create, accumulate and employ diverse forms of capital in their efforts to achieve inclusion in destination and sending societies.

### Keywords

Bourdieu; convertibility; diaspora community; migrant capital; mobilisability; networks; resources; transnational ties

### Issue

This editorial is part of the issue “Social Inclusion beyond Borders: Utilization of Migrant Capital in Transnational and Diaspora Communities” edited by Sanna Saksela-Bergholm (University of Helsinki, Finland), Mari Toivanen (University of Helsinki, Finland) and Östen Wahlbeck (University of Helsinki, Finland).

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### 1. Introduction

This thematic issue focuses on the creation, accumulation and utilisation of migrant capital in the destination and sending societies among transnational migrants and members of diaspora communities. Theoretically, this issue draws on the Bourdieusian approach to different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and builds on previous literature in which networks were discussed as a form of social capital in the context of transnational migration (Erel, 2010; Faist, 2000; Ryan, Erel, & D’Angelo, 2015; Ryan, Sales, Tilki, & Siara, 2008; Wahlbeck, 2018). In this issue, migrant capital is understood as resources that are available to members of migrant communities as a result of migration. Migrant capital consists of resources that are mobilisable, for instance, via transnational networks and ties, and potentially also convertible to other forms of capital by migrants and their family members.

In the empirical case studies are discussions about how migrants and non-migrants sharing the transnational field mobilise social resources that they have access to as a result of the migration process, and how they employ them locally and transnationally. Our aim is to discuss how different forms of migrant capital contribute to the social inclusion of migrants and members of transnational communities, by illustrating how migrant capital operates throughout the migration processes and via transnational networks. We also wish to discuss how this capital can be beneficial for the social inclusion of the broader transnational community, including subsequent generations in the diaspora, return migrants and family members left behind in the sending societies. First we provide a brief literature review of the relevant discussions, before moving forward to introduce the contributions in this thematic issue.

## 2. Migration and Social Networks

Scholarship on migrants' networks have focused on their significance to migrant communities and their members in terms of the migration decision, settlement in the new host society, integration, educational and professional achievements, and the eventual return to the sending country (Castles & Miller, 2003; Haug, 2008; Massey et al., 1998; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000). In the mid-1990s, Portes (1998) linked social capital to discussions on migration and mentioned particularly the significance of social networks in studies about ethnic businesses, entrepreneurship and ethnic niches. He noted that such resources are vital for ethnic firms and entrepreneurs as they set up their businesses and gain access to markets. Coleman's (1988, 1990) approach to social capital, on the other hand, highlighted its importance to the acquisition of human capital, and particularly discussed the inclusionary and exclusionary aspects of social capital. Putnam's (2000) theorisation on different sort of ties (bridging and bonding) and to what extent they represent a form of social capital for migrants has been particularly influential in migration studies. Loosely defined, "bridging ties" refers to between-groups connections, whereas "bonding ties" refers to within-group connections. He identifies dense networks in ethnic enclaves as an example of bonding ties (Putnam, 2000, p. 22). Theorisation in migration scholarship that deals with the linkages between migrants' networks and social capital has been particularly influenced by the literature of Coleman (1990), Portes (1998) and Putnam (2000). Indeed, these strands of the literature have been further elaborated by scholars exploring migrants' and their descendants' networks, and the resources that are embedded in them (e.g., Evergeti & Zontini, 2006; Modood, 2004; Nannestad, Svendsen, & Svendsen, 2008; Nee & Sanders, 2001; Zhou & Bankston, 1994).

Another strand of studies with the aim of understanding how social, cultural and human capital is utilised by migrant communities has drawn on the Bourdieusian understanding of different forms of capital. An advantage of the Bourdieusian perspective on migrant capital is that it can be adopted to analyse how the utilisation of resources depends on migrants' social positioning (e.g., Anthias, 2007; Erel & Ryan, 2019). According to Bourdieu (1986), people's positions in society are determined by their economic, cultural and social capital. Economic capital refers to the value of economic resources, such as money and material goods. Cultural capital comprises the skills and competence acquired through education and the socialisation process. Social capital is defined as "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). In the theory of Bourdieu (1986), the concept of capital is closely linked to his theoretical concepts of "field" and "habitus."

According to this theory, society consists of fields that structure our social world, while the concept of habitus refers to the outlook, habits and dispositions of individuals, which are usually relatively stable, and shared by people with similar backgrounds, i.e., social actors operating in specific fields.

One of the key characteristics of Bourdieu's capital theory is the convertibility and interplay of economic, social and cultural capital. Social actors in specific fields may be able to convert one form of capital into another. Yet, this convertibility depends on the rules of the field, and the possession of different amounts of cultural, economic and social capital reveal inequalities in society and how they are maintained (Bourdieu, 1986). Yet, to some extent and depending on the rules of the field, all forms of capital can be accumulated and transferred from one field to another.

The Bourdieusian approach has been employed in discussions on migrants' networks. Anthias (2007), for instance, suggests that the earlier theorisation and assumptions about networking (and by extension of social capital) cannot be directly applied to migrants. She has criticised the division of migrants' ties into bridging and bonding ties and suggested that this division is potentially essentialist as it is based on the assumed similarity in terms of ethnicity (see also Ryan, 2011, 2016). Drawing from the Bourdieusian approach, she has suggested that such an approach ignores migrants' social positionings and the differential power relations based on gender, class and generation, within the allegedly homogeneous groups. Furthermore, Ryan et al. (2008) suggest that Putnam and Coleman focus on the "stability" of social relationships, whereas migrants' ties are particularly characterised by the dynamism of (transnational) networks (see also Erel & Ryan, 2019; Ryan et al., 2015). The authors also suggest that the earlier focus has been on the local contexts, on "local associations, communities and networks," with little consideration to the fact that migrants' networks often extend beyond one particular geographical region or nation-state (see Keles, 2015; Molina, Valenzuela-García, Lubbers, García-Macías, & Pampalona, 2015).

## 3. The Transnational Context and Migrant Capital

We wish to build on these observations and suggest that it is also significant to include a focus on the transnational context when discussing social resources and how those are potentially capitalised by migrants and their descendants both locally as well as in the transnational space. The transnational perspective has been included in migration scholarship since the 1990s, introducing an emphasis on migrants' social relations and ties that extend beyond nation-states' boundaries (Bauböck & Faist, 2010; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton-Blanc (1992) famously defined transnationalism as "processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country

of settlement,” and immigrants as transmigrants, who “develop and maintain multiple relations—familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders. Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously” (Glick Schiller et al., 1992, pp. 1–2).

Scholarship on transnationalism has emphasized migrants’ agency to operate in the transnational field (Köngeter & Smith, 2015; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004), while it has also been pointed out that migrants’ positioning in the transnational field is shaped by social hierarchies and power (Anthias, 2012). The transnational ties and networks of migrants and their communities are also related to processes of belonging and inclusion in their societies of origin and settlement (e.g., Wahlbeck, 2002; Waldinger, 2015). Yet, the early celebratory enthusiasm for migrant transnationalism has in recent years shifted towards a more sober interest in how transnationalism is related to other social processes, including intersections with traditional hierarchical societal structures and inequalities (Glick Schiller, 2018). Also, migrants’ transnational social networks have been shown to constitute a social capital, which can be utilised for a variety of positive purposes (Faist, 2000; Ryan et al., 2015), provided they compensate for structural forms of disadvantage (Anthias & Cederberg, 2009).

A growing body of research has linked the transnational frame to discussions on migrants’ social resources and capital (Faist, 2000; Nowicka, 2013). For instance, Faist (2000, p. 200) points out that:

Transnational social spaces involve the accumulation, use, and effects of various sorts of capital, their volume and convertibility: economic capital, human capital, such as educational credentials, skills and know-how, and social capital, mainly resources inherent in or transmitted through social and symbolic ties.

These resources, he suggests, can potentially be transferable to another context, across nation-states’ borders. For instance, social capital has been considered as one form of remittance that migrants transmit back home (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011). Empirical studies have also described how the transnational practices and contacts of migrants can provide significant support when migrants settle in a new country (Saksela-Bergholm, 2013, 2018; Valtonen, 2015) or how they can replace or work as additional support to the welfare system of the receiving country (Martikainen, Valtonen, & Wahlbeck, 2012).

As mentioned above, the study of transnationalism has highlighted the opportunity to transfer forms of capital in transnational social fields. Migrants can use various types of capital in the transnational spaces they are embedded in (e.g., Faist, 2000). The transferability of resources between different geographical locations is eased by diverse transnational social relations and by

transnational migration as such. Yet, a Bourdieusian perspective on the social position of migrants also needs to consider the dynamics of inequality. Unequal power relations significantly influence the opportunity for migrants to utilise resources in a new field. For example, Anthias (2007) points out that not all resources are necessarily mobilisable by all social actors and she convincingly argues that the notion of social capital should be confined to mobilisable social resources. Thus, as Wahlbeck (2018) has explicitly argued, there is a need to make an analytical distinction between the *transferability* and the *mobilisability* of transnational social resources among migrants. While transferability describes “the ability of a resource to be moved across borders, mobilisability describes the actual value that the resource has in each given social context” (Wahlbeck, 2018, p. 237).

The Bourdieusian perspective on forms of capital can easily be seen as a relatively deterministic perspective, since both the rules of field and individual habitus are regarded as being relatively stable (Bourdieu, 1986). Thus, there is also a need to highlight the dynamic opportunity for social actors to generate new capital (Erel, 2010). In this thematic issue we also wish to highlight the fact that a key aspect of Bourdieu’s capital theory is the conversion of one form of capital to another. In addition to the transferability and mobilisability of capital, there is also a need to analyse the convertibility of capital by migrants. Therefore, the authors of this thematic issue have deployed the concept of migrant capital to describe how migrants are able to utilise and convert various forms of capital. For example, several of the contributions to this issue describe cases of a conversion of social capital into economic capital, and there are also clear cases of a revalorisation of cultural capital of migrants into a positive resource that can be converted into social or economic capital.

Thus, the innovative theoretical contribution of this thematic issue is to pay attention to the convertibility of capital in the transnational context from the Bourdieusian perspective. This focus on convertibility helps us to see migrants as social actors that can generate and mobilise various forms of migrant capital. From this perspective, migrant capital can be understood to be resources that are available to migrants as a result of migration. This migrant capital is mobilisable, for instance, via transnational networks and ties, and potentially also convertible to other forms of capital by migrants and their family members.

#### 4. The Contributions

The aim of contributions to this thematic issue is to understand how resources consisting of economic, social, political and cultural transnational ties, practices and networks are used and mobilised into social action among members of migrant communities. They explore how transnational resources can be mobilised and capitalised upon, and the political, societal and institutional



factors that shape the mobilisation and capitalisation of transnational social resources in different contexts. They broadly engage with the following research questions focusing on different ethnic groups, generations and national contexts:

1. How are transnational ties and networks mobilised as a social resource by members belonging to migrant communities, and what strategies are employed in this regard?
2. What role do institutional, political and economic settings play regarding the mobilisation of transnational ties and networks?
3. What processes and dynamics underline the transformation of transnational resources into migrant capital?

This thematic issue consists of empirical case studies that have been conducted with a strong micro-level approach and with qualitative methods, including multi-sited ethnography. The articles comprise studies relating to Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, the Philippines, Turkey and the United Kingdom. The articles present discussion on how migrant capital can be a resource during the migration process or an outcome of transnational migration itself. What combines all contributions is the fact that migrant capital and its role in strengthening the inclusion of members in migrant communities to the destination or to the sending societies is discussed.

The contributions in this issue explore different mechanisms and processes of social inclusion that the accumulation of migrant capital entails, emphasising the strategies and opportunities used by the members of migrant communities during the migration process. The authors approach migrant capital as a resource that becomes available to migrants during their migration process (Atasü-Topcuoğlu, 2019; Glorius, 2019; Hiitola, 2019) and as one that is created by migrants because of their migration (Koikkalainen, 2019; Wahlbeck & Fortelius, 2019). Migrant capital is also shown to be available to migrants' family members via their transnational ties (Dís Skaptadóttir, 2019; Saksela-Bergholm, 2019; Toivanen, 2019). Overall, migrant capital can constitute a source of community cohesion, economic advancement, informal social protection or for professional and educational gains for members of migrant communities.

Koikkalainen's (2019) article explores diverse socio-economic aspects of social inclusion among highly skilled Nordic migrants living in London. The article examines how the migrants see their social position in the local job market at a time of uncertainty brought on by Brexit. The article stresses the importance of Nordic background and cultural capital embodied in the migrants' habitus and their utilisation of social capital in the form of ties and networks both locally and transnationally.

Wahlbeck and Fortelius (2019) explore the social inclusion of Swedish migrants into the work force in

Helsinki, in particular the highly skilled migrants' access to the labour market. The authors build on a Bourdieusian perspective to illustrate empirically and analytically how migrants utilise and convert existing forms of capital into novel forms (Erel, 2010; Wahlbeck, 2018). These forms of capital comprise an explicit migrant capital that is mobilisable only because the migrants have moved to a new field in which they can benefit from their existing knowledge and skills related to the Swedish language and Nordic culture. The authors argue, in line with Anthias (2007) that migrants' resources do not comprise beneficial forms of social capital if these are not mobilisable in a certain social context.

Hiitola (2019) examines recently arrived refugees' experiences on family reunification among some of the refugees who arrived in Finland during 2015. Her article investigates how forced migrants residing in Finland create and allocate different types of resources in their efforts to become reunited with their families. Hiitola shows how the use of different forms of resources as such is not enough for successful reunification. In addition to individual strategies to allocate resources, institutional issues such as legal status and decision-making power among authorities influence the forced migrants' opportunities for reunification.

In her exploration of Syrian refugees' strategies to become entrepreneurs in Turkey, Atasü-Topcuoğlu (2019) intersects Bourdieu's forms of capital with Kloosterman's formulation of opportunity structure. Her study shows how diverse forms of capital are beneficial to the refugees in their attempt to become entrepreneurs. She argues that these entrepreneurs have been affected by macro-level factors (both informal and formal policies in Turkey), meso-level factors (e.g., time and space specific opportunities), and individual level factors (e.g., education and social networks). She shows how the newly arrived refugees can gain occupational independence as entrepreneurs by re-accumulating diverse forms of capital.

Dís Skaptadóttir (2019) examines the transnational mobilisation of migrant capital among Filipinos residing in Iceland. In her analysis she combines Bourdieu's concept of capital with a transnational approach. Her study, based on a multi-sited study shows how the mobilisation of capital is influenced by both structural factors, such as discrimination and racialisation in Iceland and by migrants' economic position and cultural capital in the Philippines. Migrants' ability to mobilise social and cultural resources shows how their different class positions both prior and after migration guide their access to social, economic or cultural capital.

Saksela-Bergholm (2019) analyses the role of remittances and caregiving arrangements as practices of informal social protection among Filipino labour migrants in Finland and their family members left behind in the Philippines. This multi-sited study illustrates the importance of transnational ties and networks in the negotiation of welfare practices and care arrangements among



the members of transnational families. The author shows how migrant capital is transferred to informal social protection through meaningful reciprocity between the senders and recipients of remittances. She stresses the importance of reciprocity and its social context for successful mobilisation of migrant capital among the members of transnational families.

In her article, Glorius (2019) examines student migration from Bulgaria to Germany, as well as the return migration of some of the migrants. She explores how migrant students utilise and convert social capital in a beneficial way in their efforts to access the German labour market, but also after return when some among them look for new occupational opportunities in Bulgaria. The social capital consisting of family, peer and professional networks are also useful when the return migrants adapt to the societal changes taking place in Bulgaria.

Toivanen's (2019) article examines transnational mobilities, networks and practices of second-generation Kurds in France. The aim in the article is to understand better the extent to which second-generation members are able to mobilise upon such resources for professional and educational advantage. She argues that as a result of second-generation members being raised in a transnational diaspora space, transnational networks based on diasporic bonds can constitute a form of "migrant capital" for them. Indeed, her study illustrates how the mobilisation and convertibility of migrant capital operates in the case of migrants' descendants.

The analysis in the articles considers both strategies and opportunities utilised by migrants and members of transnational communities in diverse economic, social and political context. As the articles show, transnational networks can be used by migrants and their family members to achieve occupational, economic and educational advantages (Atasü-Topcuoğlu, 2019; Dís Skaptadóttir, 2019; Glorius, 2019; Koikkalainen, 2019; Toivanen, 2019; Wahlbeck & Fortelius, 2019). They can also be useful in their attempts to reunite with family members (Hiitola, 2019) or to have access to informal social protection and care arrangements (Saksela-Bergholm, 2019) in both the sending and receiving societies. The contributions also consider the societal structures and unequal distribution of power that enable or prevent a utilisation of migrant capital. Simultaneously, they pay attention to the agency of transnational migrants and members of transnational communities.

## 5. Conclusion

In this thematic issue we suggest that it is not enough to assess the existence of transnational resources. Instead, the question that needs to be addressed is how and via which processes the existing transnational social ties and networks can be mobilised as a resource by specific social actors in a given social context, which is not merely limited to the context of the nation-state. Leaning on a Bourdieusian approach, we wish to move beyond de-

scriptive studies and theorise the role migration plays in the accumulation, conversion and utilisation of various forms capital by migrant communities and their members. We posit that the question of how such resources are accumulated over time, mobilised towards capital, transferred from one context to another and converted to other types of capital deserve more scholarly attention and empirical inquiry.

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## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

## Nordic Ties and British Lives? Migrant Capital and the Case of Nordic Migrants Living in London

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### Abstract

As a hub of finance, art, design and science, the city of London has long attracted migrants interested in study and career opportunities or simply excited about living in an open, global city. Over the last few decades, it has also been a key migration destination for Europeans originating from the Nordic countries. Based on survey data gathered through an online questionnaire, this article focuses on Nordic migrants currently living in London. Since the June 2016 referendum, the Brexit process has forced these voluntary and rather privileged migrants to question their inclusion in British society. This article discusses the role of migrant capital, i.e., the skills and resources created as a result of migration, at a time of uncertainty brought on by Brexit. It examines how these migrants see their position within the social hierarchy of the city and its job market, as well as within the local and transnational networks they maintain to their countries of origin. Their Nordic background is valuable thanks to the cultural capital embodied in their habitus as well as the social capital available via the Nordic networks in UK and transnationally.

### Keywords

Brexit; Europe; London; migration; migrant capital; Nordic countries

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction

London has long been Europe’s main global city and the driver of British economic growth with a steady demand for migrant labour at all skill levels (e.g., Favell, 2008; Talani, 2018). As a city boasting numerous job opportunities in finance, tourism, advertising, law, art, design, consultancy and research, it has also been one of the key destinations for intra-European migrants. This article discusses the role of migrant capital, i.e., the skills and resources created as a result of migration, in the lives of Nordic migrants living in London under the uncertainty caused by the Brexit referendum of 2016. An estimated 91,000 people born in one of the five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden) currently live in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2019a).

Thanks to the victory of the “Leave” campaign in the June 2016 referendum on the British membership of the

EU, the position of London as the migration destination of Europe is changing. While the timetable and manner of the UK’s break away from the European Union (EU) is still unclear three years after the referendum, the effects of the decision are already visible, for example, in migration statistics. In the last few years, the UK has been the destination of more than 600,000 migrants each year, while the numbers of people emigrating from the country have remained at around 350,000 per year. This has signified a net immigration rate of 200,000 to 300,000 migrants per year. The proportion of migrants originating from within the EU is decreasing while the number of non-EU arrivals has been rising. EU long-term immigration figures have fallen since 2016, and in 2018 the number of new arrivals was at its lowest since 2013 (Office for National Statistics, 2019b). However, in light of the national statistics of each of the Nordic countries, the popularity of the UK as a migration destination has re-

mained quite steady for Nordic migrants. In 2018, for example, more than 6,000 Nordic citizens migrated to the UK (Figure 1).

London is an exciting global city that offers the promise of self-discovery via living in a truly multicultural metropolis. For many intra-European migrants, a move to London has been a chance to experience a sense of denationalised freedom (Favell, 2008). However, the uncertainty brought on by the prolonged Brexit process has had an impact on the migrants' lives at multiple levels: for their legal status and rights as residents of the UK, for their work opportunities and career prospects, and for the sense of belonging and feeling of social inclusion in British society. Cassidy, Innocenti, and Bürkner (2018) note that in all of its complexity, the Brexit process has forced both British and EU citizens to revise their everyday sense of belonging. Migrant responses to the outcome of the vote have ranged from initial feelings of shock and panic, followed by pragmatic, adaptive strategies to build a sense of security and continuity (Botterill, McCollum, & Tyrrell, 2019). In their analysis of the situation, Guma and Dafydd Jones (2019) have examined how Brexit affects EU migrants' rights, settlement and sense of identity and argue that Brexit should be understood as an ongoing process of "othering" and "unsettling." It will thus influence the migrants' social inclusion in the UK, when it is understood as a synonym of terms such as "unity, cohesion, civic engagement [and] togetherness" (Koikkalainen, 2011, p. 454).

The aim of this article is to examine migrant capital via the experiences of Nordic migrants who are contemplating their future as the parameters of belonging and the rules regulating their rights in the UK are changing. Patterns of migrant inclusion and exclusion are not simple processes but are highly differentiated and depend on the features of individual migrants, on structural fac-

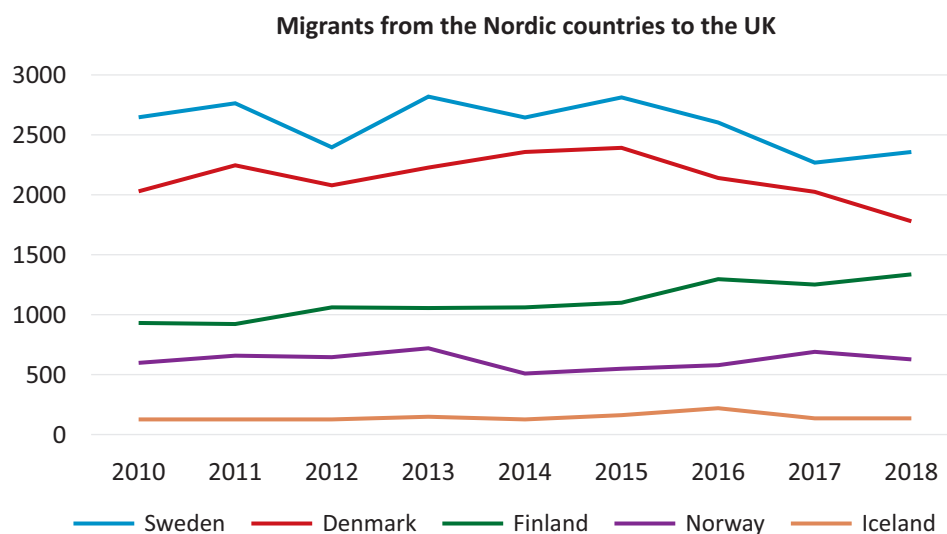
tors in the country of destination and are impacted by changes in the policies of the country in question (e.g., Carmel & Cerami, 2011). For EU nationals living in the UK, the Brexit process represents a rupture in time, an exceptional period during which they have to reconsider their personal lives, careers and mobility options. From a temporal perspective, one may hypothesise that this process is different depending on how long one has lived in the UK, how strong the ties one has formed there are, or whether one remains mostly attached to one's country of origin. Do the ways in which one feels social inclusion differ based on the length of stay in the country, and does this matter for migrant capital?

The sections of the article that follow first discuss the different forms of capital and migration, present the data and methods used in this research and then examine cultural and social capital as forms of migrant capital in the case of Nordics living in London.

## 2. The Forms of Capital and Migration

In migration research, Pierre Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) concepts "field," "habitus" and the different "types of capital" have been used in at least two ways: first, to understand the problems of transferring education, skills and expertise from one society or cultural environment to another; and second, to describe the networks and ties forged between different places as a result of migration (e.g., Erel, 2010; Erel & Ryan, 2019; Nowicka, 2013; Ryan, 2011).

For Bourdieu, all differentiated societies consist of fields or networks of relations that structure our social world: "The social cosmos is made up of a number of such relatively autonomous social microcosms, i.e., spaces of objective relations" (Wacquant, 1989, p. 39). These include the economic, artistic or religious field,



**Figure 1.** Number of Nordic citizens moving to the UK according to the national statistics data of each sending country, 2010–2018. Sources: Statistics Denmark (2019), Statistics Finland (2019), Statistics Iceland (2019), Statistics Norway (2019), and Statistics Sweden (2019).



that each follows a particular logic of its own and is an arena for struggles over the specific resources of that field (Wacquant, 1989, pp. 39–40; see also Jenkins, 2002, pp. 84–85).

Habitus refers to the outlook, habits and dispositions embodied onto oneself during socialization; and consists of “schemes of perception, thought, and action” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 14). It is relevant in the context of migration because a change of cultural and spatial location brings into view social conventions that are usually taken for granted. As Bourdieu noted in an interview with his colleague Loïc Wacquant: “And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself ‘as fish in water,’ it does not feel the weight of the water and takes the world about itself for granted” (Wacquant, 1989, p. 43). The act of migration calls into question the schemes one has learned to live by, as the “water” one must swim in does not conform to one’s expectations.

Bourdieu also defined three types of capital: economic, social and cultural. Economic capital refers to a command over economic or monetary resources and social capital refers to resources based on membership of certain networks or groups, such as influence and support. Cultural capital refers to skills and knowledge acquired through education and through the socialisation process (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 242–243). When the value of these forms of capital is known and recognised either in individual, everyday contexts, or collective, political contexts, they are transformed into symbolic capital, and play a role in the process of societal reproduction (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 17). When migrants cross national borders, they enter a different social sphere, where the types of capital and relations of symbolic power are constructed differently in the various fields that they encounter.

An individual’s cultural capital is not a static entity: migrants create new cultural capital in their new country of residence and find ways in which to validate their capital in the new context (Erel, 2010, pp. 649–650) or when they negotiate its value in the local labour market (Csedő, 2008). Migration itself also generates new cultural capital for the migrant in the form of new skills, language competence and experiences of adaptation and learning to manage in different situations. One term used to describe such capital gained during student migration is “mobility capital,” which has been defined as a “sub-component of human capital, enabling individuals to enhance their skills because of the richness of the international experience gained by living abroad” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003, p. 51). Human capital is a concept often used in, for example, economic migration research and discussions on “brain drain” to describe the total of individuals’ skills, knowledge and experiences (e.g., Boeri, Brücker, Docquier, & Rapoport, 2012; Poot, Waldorf, & van Wissen, 2009). In this study, however, the Bourdieusian approach is preferred as it is more versatile and offers the option of making more nuanced analyses when the transnational networks and resources that

are at the migrant’s disposal are also taken into account. Therefore, the concept of migrant capital is preferred to that of mobility capital, which has mostly been used in connection with student migration when describing the added value of mobility to one’s human capital.

Social capital is the grand total of actual or potential resources that one can mobilise from one’s network, group or collective based on solidarity (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 248–249). For Bourdieu these social networks are not a natural given but must be constructed through investment strategies that aim at institutionalising group relations as a source of benefits (Portes, 1998, p. 3). Anthias (2007) stresses that in the migration context, social capital should refer to social ties and networks that can be mobilised. Ethnic ties may be valuable forms of capital, but their value is often context-dependent and members of these networks are at different positions in how they may take advantage of them in pursuing social advantage. Further, Wahlbeck (2018) argues that an important analytical distinction exists between the *transferability* and the *mobilisability* of transnational social resources as network membership does not automatically signify that these ties have significant value. Nowicka (2013) concludes that transnational migrants occupy multiple social positions: they may be embedded in a single space, shift between countries and transnational social spaces and hence encounter many valorisations and conversions of their capital. Also, Erel and Ryan (2019) note that the dynamic process of capital accumulation in the migration context is multi-level and spatio-temporally contingent.

Building on this work, and that of others, I understand migrant capital to consist of two interrelated aspects. These are the new cultural capital of a mobile individual, i.e., the experiences, skills and competence gained during the process of migration, and the economic and social capital and networks that span borders and from which the mobile individual can draw from and contribute towards. How the different aspects of migrant capital play out in each case is highly context-dependent and transnational mobility can add to one’s capital in several ways. For example, one’s economic capital can increase via remittances sent to family members or investments into the country or origin or via earning significantly higher salaries in the country of destination. For voluntary intra-European migrants originating from affluent, Nordic democracies, sending remittances or striving for economic gain has not typically been the main motivation for migration (e.g., Koikkalainen, 2013). Therefore, in this article, migrant capital is discussed in reference to cultural and social, rather than economic capital.

### 3. Data and Methods

This article is based on qualitative data gathered in 2018–2019 and it examines migration capital through the case of Nordic migrants in London in a contextually and temporally sensitive manner. The aim is not to provide a statistically representative picture of any

one national group, but rather to learn from their experiences as a group living in London during the Brexit-fuelled uncertainty. As the Nordic people in London are not concentrated in any single physical location, the best place to find participants for the study was to turn to the virtual world. Virtual ethnography is a way of doing “ethnographic research *in, of and through* the virtual” (Hine, 2000, p. 65) and by using the social networks that exist online. The study, therefore, began with a small-scale virtual ethnography tracing the existence of virtual networks and communities that unite London-based migrants from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. The focus was on the online services that distribute job information and on the various virtual discussion groups and websites that distribute “silent knowledge” about living in London. During the period of participant observation, discussions were followed in eight Facebook groups for Scandinavians and Nordic nationals in London and the UK, and a number of blogs, Brexit-related Twitter debates and online news media reporting.

Then data were collected via an online survey ( $N = 164$ ) advertised in the Nordic social networks, especially Facebook and Twitter. In addition to asking members of the Facebook groups to take part in the survey, it was also advertised through Facebook advertisements. The survey included questions on the work situation, education, citizenship, partner, children, reasons for migration, identity, international experience, positive treatment versus discrimination, transnational ties, life in London and thoughts about Brexit. Nine of the questions were open-ended. The method of publicising the survey in social media had an impact on the kind of people that took part in the survey. When participants are recruited mainly via one social media platform, one needs to be critical as to the representativeness of the sample in terms of the whole population of interest (Ignacio, 2013). While those who are active members in expatriate Facebook groups are a somewhat select group, using advertising which targeted all Facebook-users with a Nordic background located in London, was a way to diversify the sample when dealing with such a hard-to-reach population (see also Pötzschke & Braun, 2017). The expatriate communities of the Nordics living in London differ from each other. While the Finnish Facebook groups tend to be active with daily discussions on diverse topics, the groups of Swedes, Norwegians, Icelanders and Danes are less community-like and rather focus on sharing invitations about particular events or information about companies looking for employees skilled in Scandinavian languages, for example. This is one reason why the selection of participants is biased towards Finns, who formed 44% of all respondents of the survey. Due to the uneven participation of people of the different Nordic nationalities in the survey, no direct comparisons between the countries have been made.

In addition, 15 narrative, in-depth life-historical interviews were conducted with selected survey participants (aged 19 to 39 years) during a fieldwork visit to

London and via Skype. For comparative purposes, the interviews were conducted following the question structure of a European research project titled YMOBILITY, which focused on youth migration in Europe in nine countries (e.g., King & Williams, 2018; Lulle, Moroşanu, & King, 2018). Each data type was analysed with slightly different methods. The online textual data, for example, were analysed via a discursive and practice-oriented virtual ethnographic approach (Hine, 2000, pp. 18–19; see also Kozinets, 2010). The survey open-ended responses and interview transcripts have been analysed with narrative content analysis (Spencer, Ritchie, & O’Connor, 2006, pp. 200–204) to find commonalities in the descriptions of the research participants. To tease out the information relevant to migrant capital, the data were analysed and themes formed from the vantage point of how the Nordic background is visible in their daily lives and careers in London, in their interactions with British society and in light of the ties that still bind them to their respective Nordic countries. In this article, the survey data and the responses to the survey’s open-ended questions are the primary forms of data used.

#### 4. Nordic Migrants in Light of the Survey Data

Finns were the largest national group in the overall survey data (44%) followed by Danes (23%), Swedes (16%), Norwegians (12%) and Icelanders (4%). There is a strong gender bias, as 80% of all respondents were female and only 20% male. The participants had diverse migration backgrounds: For some the move to London had been the only form of international mobility, while others had lived abroad before or moved back and forth between the UK and their country of origin. A vast majority of the respondents were still Nordic country citizens (88%) with the rest holding either Nordic-British, or some other dual nationality. The overall work situation of the respondents was good as 71% were in full-time employment, while some were working part-time or as freelancers (14%), were looking for work (4%), were studying (4%), were engaged in care work at home (4%) or were already retired (3%). The survey respondents were mainly highly educated, as 68% has either a bachelor’s or a master’s degree and 7% had a PhD degree. The rest had a professional degree (8%), were still studying (3%) or had not completed a degree (14%).

In migration research, there are three important dimensions of time to consider: age at migration, length of residence in the destination country and age (Stevens & Ishizawa, 2013). In their study based on migrants of different ethnic backgrounds living in Norway, Erdal and Ezzati (2015) found that age at the time of migration and the relative proportion of life spent in the country of origin and in the settlement country are important factors in migrants’ considerations about settlement and return. Also, other studies have found that a migrant’s inclusion and the process of embedding in the country of destination changes as time passes (e.g., King & Mai, 2008; Ryan,



2018) and as one forms closer bonds with the country of residence.

To analyse the temporal nature of migrant capital, the survey respondents were divided into four groups according to the time they had lived in the UK. The groups were: recent migrants (N = 41, in the UK for less than two years), settled migrants (N = 41, in the UK for three to nine years), residents (N = 47, in the UK for 10 to 19 years) and long-term residents (N = 35, in the UK for more than 20 years).

The groups were at different stages of their life course: While the recent and settled migrants are in their twenties and thirties, the residents and long-term residents are in their forties and fifties. In terms of the family situation, in each group as well as in the overall data, those who were married or in a relationship were the majority (68%). The proportion of singles was highest in the youngest group of recent migrants (41%) and lowest in the oldest group of long-term residents (23%). Only 10% of both migrant groups stated that they have children, while the proportion of those with children is much higher in both resident groups (49% and 40% respectively). Key characteristics of each group are detailed

in Table 1.

In terms of primary motives for migration, the most common one selected by the participants was for “love” and/or “family” reasons (29% of all respondents) and to study (27%). In addition, 26% stated that they moved primarily for reasons related to work or career and 18% for lifestyle. There was some variation in this respect between the four groups: for the recent migrants and residents the most important motivation was “work” (34% and 35%), whereas for the settled migrants it was “to study” (37%) and for the long-term residents it was “love” and/or “family” (37%). One significant difference between the migration experiences of these groups was that the *recent migrants* moved to the UK either during the Brexit campaign or after the June 2016 EU referendum and were thus aware of the fact that their rights as EU citizens might be at risk due to the Brexit process.

### 5. Cultural Capital as Migrant Capital: Skills, Cultural Knowledge and Languages

Migration can have a positive or negative impact on one’s cultural capital depending on how it is valued in the new

**Table 1.** Key characteristics of the four migrant groups.

	Recent migrants (moved in 2016–2018, N = 41)		Settled migrants (moved in 2009–2015, N = 41)		Residents (moved in 1999–2008, N = 47)		Long-term residents (moved in 1998 or earlier, N = 35)		All respondents (N = 164)	
Country of origin										
Finland	17	41%	18	44%	25	53%	12	34%	72	44%
Denmark	13	32%	9	22%	10	21%	6	17%	38	23%
Sweden	5	12%	6	15%	7	15%	9	26%	27	16%
Norway	4	10%	7	17%	3	6%	6	17%	20	12%
Iceland	2	5%	1	2%	2	4%	2	6%	7	4%
Gender										
Male	29	71%	32	78%	40	85%	31	89%	132	80%
Female	12	29%	9	22%	7	15%	4	11%	32	20%
Motivation										
Study	10	24%	15	37%	11	24%	9	26%	45	28%
Work	14	34%	6	15%	16	35%	7	20%	43	26%
Love, family	11	27%	13	32%	9	20%	13	37%	46	28%
Lifestyle	6	15%	7	17%	10	22%	6	17%	29	18%
Relationship										
Married/relationship	23	56%	29	71%	33	70%	27	77%	112	68%
Single/other	18	44%	12	29%	14	30%	8	23%	52	32%
Children										
Has children	4	10%	4	10%	23	49%	14	40%	45	27%
No children	34	83%	34	83%	21	45%	13	37%	102	62%
Skipped question	3	7%	3	7%	3	6%	8	23%	17	10%
Age										
Median age group	25–29		30–34		40–44		45–49		35–39	
Largest age group	20–24		30–34		40–44		45–49		30–34 + 40–44	
Average age	~29 years		~34 years		~42 years		~50 years		~38 years	

context. For example, the significance of one's previous work experience may not be understood, or a foreign degree might not be fully recognised. In these cases, the migrant might have to accept employment at a lower level than before, continue studying, or look for work in a new field (cf. Koikkalainen, 2014). The situation naturally varies according to the field of employment, as professions differ greatly in how transferable qualifications are across borders. Yet the value of some skills, such as cultural knowledge or competence in relatively uncommon languages, may increase with migration as is evident in the survey data on Nordic migrants. Examples of careers built on languages and cultural competence can be found from all four groups, from recent migrants to long-term residents.

Nordic competence can set newly arrived migrants apart from other job applicants when there is competition over jobs. In response to what it is like to be a Nordic migrant in London, this Norwegian respondent explains:

Easy to get a Norway-related job. As long as you have a good understanding of the Scandinavian languages, it is pretty easy to get into different businesses. Of course, it is competitive but not close to what it would have been being British. I got a job here straight after finishing uni[versity] here and the next job was also another global company. (Female, age 40–45, year of moving to London 2003)

Another quote from a recent Swedish migrant reads: "Well...as I work in a place which contains a lot of flat packs in my language...it has come quite handy to know the meaning of the names of all that stuff. People do ask about it" (Female, age 40–45, year of moving to London 2017). This also applies to Finnish, which is a member of a different language family from the one that includes Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish and Danish. A settled migrant from Finland explains: "I've gotten all my jobs so far because I speak Finnish. This has also meant I've ended up in offices with other [Northern] Europeans" (Female, age 30–34, year of moving to London 2013).

For some migrants, the first job gained because of one's Nordic cultural capital was an entry-level job that later led to other jobs that no longer relied on one's migration-related cultural capital. This was the case with the Norwegian professional quoted above who has since worked in two global companies that she thinks would have been hard to get into had she stayed in her native country. Yet some of the long-term residents have built their whole career on their Nordic competence, as this Swedish freelancer explains: "I use the Swedish language in many of the jobs I do, for example, I teach Swedish, I do translation work and I'm a professional tourist guide, working mainly with visitors from Scandinavia" (Female, age 55–59, year of moving to London 1990). In London, a global business hub, there is demand for expertise in the Nordic market as this Icelandic respondent explains: "My work has involved partnering with customers in the

Nordic countries. My language skills—I speak Icelandic and the Scandinavian languages—have been very helpful in my professional life" (Male, age 50–54, year of moving to London 1998).

Skills embodied in one's habitus as a natural part of the cultural capital gained growing up in a Nordic country can thus be an advantage in an environment in which these skills are scarce. Migration also generates other types of cultural capital, i.e., that related to the experiences of adaptation and resilience in starting again in a new country. The four groups examined in this article did not differ from each other significantly in terms of their previous international experience, but there was considerable variation within the groups. For some, the move to the UK was the only noteworthy form of international experience, while others had lived, worked or studied in several countries. An international background opens doors for further mobility and many respondents reflected on the possibility of having to move again due to Brexit. As this Danish respondent concludes:

London is a city like most other European capitals, and I could live in either....Before then I had worked in Greece and Italy and didn't feel like I had to stay in any one place. I was fine to move wherever there would be work. (Female, age 30–34, year of moving to London 2016)

For many, the future was clouded in uncertainty, as the implications of their work situation were not yet known. A Finnish lawyer noted:

Working in the City, my career future in the UK depends on how much of the City is left after Brexit. I'm confident I'll be permitted to stay in the UK, but I'm not going to stay if there aren't jobs for me. I am in a state of permanent insecurity as to my future due to Brexit. (Male, aged 40–44, year of moving to London 2009)

## 6. Social Capital as Migrant Capital: Ties, Networks and Resources

Migration also has an impact on one's social capital, because moving away adds an element of distance to the relationship one has with family, friends and colleagues. However, this does not necessarily signify severing ties with one's social networks or the different types of resources one has access to via these connections. Migrants send and receive money, gifts, knowledge and care across borders via these networks and continue to interact in the social fields that they left behind. Migrants have several types of "transnational social positioning" as the outcome of intersections and conversions of social economic and cultural capital across borders, when lives are lived in multiple locations (Nowicka, 2013, p. 31).

In the case of Nordic migrants in London, monetary transactions across borders are not a significant form

of interaction, because purely economic motives for migration are rare. Only two respondents among the 164 explicitly stated that money was a factor in moving to London, and both also mentioned other aspects, such as “gaining experience” and “having more work opportunities.” Apart from top executives or other highly-paid professionals working in the City, the income levels after living expenses in London are not necessarily that different from the Nordic countries. Thus, migrating for the purpose of sending remittances to family members or to support schooling and care of one’s children back home is not an issue with the Nordics. However, the continued participation in transnational social networks is valuable in various ways and may have an impact on one’s future mobility choices.

When presented with a list of ten possible ways of interacting with their former home country, the survey respondents selected an average of six ways, the most common ones being “regular visits on holiday,” “keeping contact via social media” and “reading online news.” In addition, they also keep in touch with their Nordic culture and fellow nationals living in London by speaking their native language, eating Nordic food, meeting friends and hosting visitors from the former home country. The importance of social media networks is especially visible in the Finnish migrant Facebook groups, through which members regularly ask for help and information from their social network. Interestingly, identification with the Nordic home country is high with all the four groups: 76% of the respondents reported having a strong or very strong identity bond to their respective countries. Perhaps underlining the special nature of London as a world city and a migration destination, respondents in all groups had a stronger identification with the city than with the UK in general. “I am now even more of a Londoner and less of a person living in the UK,” explains a Swedish respondent who thinks that “London is simply the greatest city on earth” (Male, age 45–49, year of moving to London 1997). The long-term residents, the group that has lived in the UK for more than 20 years, has understandably the strongest identification with their new home country, as 57% identify either strongly or very strongly with the UK. This proportion is only 37% with the most recent migrants, those with less than two years of experience living in London.

Based on the answers to the open-ended questions, Brexit is playing a key role in how the respondents saw the possibility of social inclusion in the UK. A majority were “absolutely gobsmacked,” felt “horrified” or were “in shock” when they heard about the referendum result and began to worry about what it would mean for them as residents of the country. For many, the result felt like a betrayal as this Danish respondent explains: “It’s difficult to identify with a country that is so polarised and doesn’t want EU citizens here, hence [this is] why I will also leave the UK” (Female, age 40–44, year of moving to London 1998). Some of the recent migrants explicitly stated that the timing of their move was influenced by the situa-

tion, like this Finnish respondent working in the finance industry who stated: “I did see this as a last chance to move before Brexit” (Female, age 25–29, year of moving to London 2017). She says that she was upset about realising that “up to 52% of Brits think [she] shouldn’t be [there].” Having completed her university degree in the UK she is fairly settled in the social field there and has been moving between Finland and the UK since 2010. At the time of the survey, she was planning to leave the UK before Brexit happens. She explains: “I used to think that London was the greatest city on earth but now I think that title probably goes to Berlin.”

## 7. Discussion

The concepts of cultural, social and economic capital are valuable for an analysis of the migration processes in several ways. For example, one can analyse how the mobile individual makes the best possible use of their cultural capital in new surroundings, interacts in the transnational social space between the country of origin and destination and gains social capital and then manages to turn these assets into monetary form as economic capital. Cederberg (2015, p. 46) notes that in migration contexts, the different forms of capital are intertwined in numerous ways as cultural capital can at times be converted into social capital by providing access to valuable social resources, and embodied cultural capital is reproduced in social networks. Together, the different forms of capital of an individual contribute towards the sum total of their symbolic capital, which Jenkins (2002, p. 85) simply defines as “prestige and social honour.” The power drawn from possessing the right types of symbolic capital, in turn, contributes in legitimating our social world, as “objective relations of power tend to reproduce themselves in relations of symbolic power” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 21).

For Nordic migrants, the value of their cultural capital in the migration context is generally well recognised, at least if the migrant is willing and able to utilise his or her background effectively. Koikkalainen (2014) defines three strategies that migrants in such situations can adopt when looking for work and trying to get the best possible value for their cultural capital abroad. The somewhat overlapping strategies are: simple adaptation to the rules of the local labour market, distinction based on one’s rare and marketable skills and reorientation to look for work in a new field. The Nordic migrant groups in the UK are too small to constitute ethnic neighbourhoods or large ethnic economies (Light & Gold, 2000) or ethnically defined migration industries (Garapich, 2008) that provide entry-level jobs and drive further migration. Yet, for many of the study participants, the skills and contacts related to their Nordic background had been enough to make them distinct enough to manoeuvre in the London labour market.

Many survey respondents stated that they have never felt discriminated against, they felt privileged in

comparison with other migrant groups and could even benefit from the fact that they are foreign. These experiences are related to a Nordic stereotype or what Weiner and Klekowski von Koppenfels (2019) call “country label”: a set of beliefs relating to a perceived high or low status of a particular country, what its citizens are like, and what the education level in the country is. The significance of Nordic migrants’ social capital in the migration context lies mainly in cultural ties and the prospects for mobility in the future. There are no major transfers of monetary resources at present, apart from some investing in property abroad to secure their options to return or onward migrate. Yet Nordic networks both in the UK and in their country of origin are used as a form of everyday transnationalism to gain information, share experiences and teach the Nordic languages and cultural practices to their British-born children.

Despite the status of relative privilege as a migrant group, the uncertainty caused by the Brexit process has already had an impact on the lives of Nordic migrants. The four groups analysed in this article differed in their intentions to stay in the UK. A majority in each group thought they would stay in the UK during the next three years, but the proportions of those likely to stay are higher the longer the individuals had lived in the country. Fifty-one percent of the recent and 56% of the settled migrants thought staying in the UK was likely, while 74% of the residents and 77% of the long-term residents thought the same. The figures follow a similar pattern when the respondents evaluate their life in five years’ time: Only 24% of the recent and 32% of the settled migrants estimated that they would stay, whereas 40% of the residents and 51% of the long-term residents thought this was likely. Thinking about return migration is the highest in the recent migrant group (20%) as is the proportion of those who were unsure where they would be living in three years’ time (20%).

## 8. Conclusion

The natural experiment currently underway in Europe in the form of Brexit is an excellent case of when the macro level (the politics of Brexit) and the micro level (the experiences of intra-European migrants) should not be studied separately, but rather as interlinked processes unfolding in rich and unpredictable ways. In a similar vein, Erel and Ryan (2019, p. 249) argue that “research should look at the formation of migrants’ capitals through the micro-level of personal narratives, the meso-level of networks and the macro-level of structural factors, such as changing global, national and transnational socio-economic and political relations and conditions.” For the Nordics, as citizens of affluent European countries with strong market and cultural ties to the UK, the impact of positive stereotyping and cultural trends labelled “Nordic cool” or “Scandinavia” in the British media, has created a niche in the labour market as well as a sense of being welcome. With the risk of engaging in methodological nationalism

(Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002) with highlighting the experience of one particular migrant group it can be stated that Nordic migrants are generally well accepted in the UK and able to feel that they belong to the country—or did so at least until the uncertainty following the Brexit referendum in 2016.

The public discourse on Brexit has led to a quasi-nationalistic invocation of community into the social imagination, in which in the everyday understandings of inclusion and of deciding who is a rightful autochthonous member of the British society are stressed (Cassidy et al., 2018, p. 191). In the narratives of the residents and long-term residents, who have lived in the UK for decades, many go along with this pressure and talk of their contributions for the benefit of the UK, such as paying taxes and raising new British citizens, thanks to which they should be entitled to belong. Like this Danish respondent explains:

Brexiters have told me to shut up and go home to my own country as the issue of Brexit is only to be discussed and decided by British people....Ever since I came to the UK I have worked and paid taxes, but now I am not allowed an opinion about the future of the UK? (Male, Danish, age 50–54, year of moving to London 2007)

For the recent migrants and settled migrants, the idea of not being welcome is perhaps less heart-breaking and many have stated that they sympathise with the British people who have nowhere to go if the country ends up in chaos. In the words of another Danish migrant: “I was worried how it was going to affect my rights in the UK. But actually, I felt even more sorry for the Brits and the unsettling situation they are finding themselves in now” (Female, age 20–24, year of moving to London 2016).

Because the scope of this article does not allow for a comparison with other migrant groups, it is difficult to say what, if anything, is unique to the experience of Nordic migrants in London. Examining how the changing situation is experienced by other nationalities in London would add to our understanding of how other variables, such as education levels, employment sectors, race and class have an impact on how Brexit is perceived and how migrant capital is useful for life in a global city. For the Nordic migrants living in London, migrant capital consists first and foremost of cultural and social capital. For them, the Nordic background is valuable thanks to the cultural capital embodied in their habitus as well as the social capital available via the Nordic networks in UK and transnationally. Both these aspects are present regardless of how long the migrant has been living in the UK, even though a longer stay in the country signifies more attachment and ties in the UK. Thus, their migrant capital it is beneficial in terms of achieving social inclusion both in the UK and as a way of possibly migrating abroad if Brexit makes life too difficult for Nordic migrants in the UK.

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## Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

# The Utilisation of Migrant Capital to Access the Labour Market: The Case of Swedish Migrants in Helsinki

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## Abstract

This article explains from a Bourdieusian perspective how migrants gain access to fields in which their resources are valued and their cultural and social capital can be mobilised. Interviews conducted among Swedish migrants in Helsinki (Helsingfors) illustrate how the migrants have been able to utilise various forms of capital to gain access to the local labour market. Knowledge of the Swedish language and society may constitute cultural capital, but only in specific occupations and social contexts. The article highlights the importance of access to social networks among Finnish spouses and friends in finding information about the jobs in which knowledge of the Swedish language and society is valued. The results indicate that the resources of migrants do not always constitute a valuable social capital, migrants also need to be able to mobilise their resources in a given social context. It is also argued that there may be specific forms of cultural and social capital that are only available to migrants as a consequence of their being migrants. This migrant capital consists of the various forms of capital that are connected to the migration process and are mobilisable by the migrants.

## Keywords

Bourdieu; employment; Finland; labour market; migrant capital; social networks; Swedish language

## Issue

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## 1. Introduction

This article presents results of an interview study conducted among Swedish migrants living in Helsinki (Helsingfors). The analysis of their experiences focuses on the mobilisation of cultural and social capital to gain access to the local labour market. Migrants moving from Sweden to Finland tend to be highly skilled, and may have both skills and access to various resources. Yet, a growing body of literature, including research in the Nordic countries, indicates that social integration remains a challenge even for highly skilled migrants (e.g., Habti & Koikkalainen, 2014; Povrzanović Frykman & Öhländer, 2018; Weiner & Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2019). Furthermore, integration into the labour market

tends to be a key integration challenge for migrants in Finland (Martikainen, Valtonen, & Wahlbeck, 2012). Taking a Bourdieusian approach to capital theory, the article gives insights into processes of labour market integration and the mechanisms for mobilising migrant capital among Swedish migrants. Thus, the aim is to draw attention to both the agency of the migrants when they navigate a new labour market and the structural constraints of the fields in question (Bourdieu, 1986).

Finland is officially a bilingual country where both Finnish and Swedish are national languages, although Swedish is a minority language in practice. Swedish citizens are in a specific position as immigrants, because their first language is one of the national languages. For various historical reasons, Swedish may also constitute



a form of cultural capital that is positively valued and may be locally associated with a good social status. In Helsinki, Swedish has historically been extensively used and there is a separate public education system and public institutions that according to the law should provide services in Swedish. Furthermore, private firms, especially those involved in trade with the Scandinavian countries, tend to value knowledge of the Swedish language. In terms of economic value, for instance, Sweden (together with Germany) is the most important export partner. Nevertheless, Swedish is not an asset in all situations and in all jobs in Finland. It is not easy for an immigrant to know where, how and in what social fields various language skills are valued. The need to acquire knowledge of the field is especially acute in the case of entry into the labour market, as the value of specific languages may vary a lot depending on the job in question. Various social networks may provide migrants with knowledge about the local labour market, and the results of our study point towards the importance of access to social networks among Finnish spouses and friends in finding information about the jobs in which knowledge of the Swedish language and society is valued.

## 2. Migrant Capital

Our analysis of migrant capital builds upon a Bourdieusian perspective on capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986) and is inspired by recent debates in the sociology of migration concerning the mobilisability of various forms of capital among migrants (Anthias, 2007; Cederberg, 2012; Erel, 2010; Erel & Ryan, 2019; Ryan, Erel, & D'Angelo, 2015; Wahlbeck, 2018). As Anthias (2007) points out, and Erel and Ryan (2019) outline more specifically, a Bourdieusian perspective on migrant capitals can be adopted to analyse how the mobilisation of resources depends on migrants' social positioning. Bourdieu generally distinguishes between economic, cultural and social capital, and one of the key characteristics of his theory is the convertibility and interplay of different sorts of capital. The concept of capital is one of Bourdieu's three main theoretical concepts, the other two being "habitus" and "field." Economic capital refers to the value of economic resources, such as money and material goods. Cultural capital, in turn, refers to a culturally specific "competence" (Bourdieu, 1986), whereas social capital is closely linked with social networks, and is defined as "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119).

According to Bourdieu (1986), the various forms of capital always operate in a given social context, which he refers to as the field. Furthermore, social capital presupposes a continuous series of social exchanges. Thus, the value of social capital is never absolute and the possibility to mobilise a resource depends on the value

it has in each field. Correspondingly, the dispositions and practices (i.e., habitus) of social actors change according to the shifting positions they take in the field and depend on how the valorisation of various forms of capital is (re)negotiated in the field (Bourdieu, 1977; Nowicka, 2015).

Migration includes movement from one social context to another: From a Bourdieusian perspective, migrants enter into new fields. The cultural and social capital that migrants possessed in the country of origin is seldom valued in the same way in the new social contexts in which they find themselves. However, it is important not to understand migrants' capital as a set of resources that migrants bring from their country of origin to the country of settlement that either fit or do not fit. As Erel (2010) argues, there is reason to use a Bourdieusian approach to question these so-called "rucksack approaches." She points out that migration often results in new ways of producing and re-producing (mobilising, enacting, validating) cultural capital that builds on, rather than simply mirror, power relations of either the country of origin or the country of migration. Thus, migrants should be seen as social actors who actively create new capital and validation mechanisms (Erel, 2010). To do this successfully, migrants need to navigate new social contexts and get information about the fields that are of significance for their social position. As discussed later in this article, the navigation may involve relations on multiple (micro, meso, and macro) levels of society, thus requiring a multi-level analysis of migrant capital (Erel & Ryan, 2019).

Previous research on migrants' access to and trajectories in the labour market indicates that social capital is often a prerequisite for getting a job, whereas cultural capital may play a vital role in the establishment of new social networks (e.g., Camenisch & Suter, 2019; del Rey, Rivera-Navarro, & Paniagua, 2019; Ryan, Sales, Tilki, & Siara, 2008; Thondhlana, Madziva, & McGrath, 2016). Furthermore, the fact that an individual or a group has migrated may also provide the migrants in question with new skills and access to new resources. Personal experience of migration may be considered cultural capital, for example in specific occupations that value multicultural expertise. Furthermore, migration creates transnational social networks that migrants can utilise in various ways. These networks provide social capital that, for example, is useful in transnational entrepreneurship (Wahlbeck, 2018). We therefore argue in this article that there may be specific forms of cultural and social capital that are only available to migrants as a consequence of their being migrants. The various forms of capital that migrants can mobilise because of their personal involvement in migration are in this article described as "migrant capital." The fact that the migrants in our study came from Sweden may equip them with specific resources of value on the local labour market. Our analysis focuses on the strategies and agency of the migrants in finding a job in Helsinki, the aim being to provide information on the mobilisability of their migrant capital.

### 3. Methods

This article reports results from semi-structured interviews with 30 Swedish citizens, conducted in Helsinki in 2011–2012. The general aims were to study migration patterns and experiences of social integration in a new social context. Finland and Sweden have a long common history of transnational migration, and Swedes with a significant Finnish ancestry or identity were excluded from the study. Hence, the sample comprised adult Swedish citizens in the age range between 20 and 55, who had lived permanently for at least a year in Finland, but who were not Finnish citizens, did not have Finnish parents, were not born in Finland, and did not identify themselves as Finns. The interviewees had lived in Finland for up to 25 years, but the average was nine years. However, because of the transnational nature of the migration patterns it was often difficult to calculate the exact length of stay in Finland. Many had moved multiple times back and forth between the two countries, and the move to Finland tended to be a gradual process (Wahlbeck, 2015a). The interviews included an almost equal number of men and women (14 men and 16 women). Interviewees complying with the sample criteria were found through various informal channels combined with snowball sampling (Fortelius, 2014; Wahlbeck, 2015b).

The interviews were carried out by both authors. They were conducted in Swedish and the length was between one and two hours. All the interviews were fully transcribed. A comprehensive content analysis of the transcriptions was facilitated by the use of a computer program for qualitative analysis guided by the methodology of grounded theory (Atlas-ti). The quotations from the interviews cited in this article were translated from Swedish into English by the authors, and the names of the interviewees are pseudonyms.

The interviews were semi-structured and focused on migration and integration experiences. Among the topics were the reasons and motivations for the migration decisions, and detailed questions were asked about the social ties that facilitated migration and integration. The methods, the data and some of the results concerning migration patterns and social integration have been presented in previous publications and unpublished reports of this research project (Fortelius, 2014; Wahlbeck, 2015a, 2015b). This article builds upon the results of the project to provide a unique analysis of the transcribed interviews from the perspective of migrant capital theory.

### 4. Swedish Migration to Finland

The migration of Swedish citizens from Sweden to Finland has not followed the typical pattern of migration between these two countries, in that the major migration flow has been that of Finns moving to Sweden. Labour migration from Finland to Sweden is among the largest labour migration flows in post-war Europe. It was

facilitated by Nordic agreements in the 1950s on the freedom of movement, equal social rights and a common labour market. These agreements apply to citizens of all Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), but the free movement was initially mostly utilised by Finns. Swedish population statistics record 530,000 official migrants from Finland to Sweden in the period 1945–1999, most of them during the 1960s and 1970s. This mass migration was followed by a return migration of more than half of the Finnish migrants: 300,000 people officially moved in the other direction during the same period of time. Return migration and repeated migration became increasingly common and the migrants developed extensive transnational social ties and networks involving both countries (Korkiasaari & Tarkiainen, 2000; Wahlbeck, 2015a).

Until recently, it was predominantly Finnish citizens that moved in both directions between Finland and Sweden. Thus, research on the migration of Finns is extensive, whereas very few studies have been conducted on Swedes moving to Finland. However, population statistics clearly show that the number of Swedish citizens (especially males) moving to Finland has steadily increased since the late 1970s. Our study explicitly focused on Swedish migrants who did not have a previous connection to Finland, the aim being to study the migration motivations of this new group of migrants. The significant explanation of the migration was that the Swedes had moved to Finland with, or because of, a Finnish partner. Mixed families consisting of Finnish and Swedish citizens are very common in both countries, the family combination of a Swedish man and a Finnish woman being more common than vice versa (Wahlbeck, 2015a, 2015b). Consequently, there is an overrepresentation of men among Swedish migrants in Finland: At the time of this study, 63% of Swedish citizens in Helsinki were men (Wahlbeck, 2015b, pp. 56–62). Nevertheless, there are both men and women who originally arrived as single young migrants with the initial intention to stay for a short period of time, but ending up staying for a longer time, which is similar to the migration trajectories found among Swedish female migrants in the United States (Lundström, 2014) and young Swedes in Norway (Tolgensbakk, 2015).

Helsinki, the capital of Finland, has been the major destination for Swedish migrants moving to Finland in recent years. Excluding people with dual Finnish citizenship, the number of Swedish citizens in Helsinki in 2010 was 1278 people, comprising 803 men and 475 women (Statistics Finland, 2019). The city is a suitable location in which to study integration into a local labour market, being geographically situated relatively far from Sweden (i.e., frequent commuting to Sweden, which can be found in some parts of Finland, is out of the question). Helsinki provides good employment opportunities, at least in comparison to other parts of Finland where there are mostly relatively high rates of unemployment, especially among the foreign-born population. Of signif-

icance for the labour market integration of Swedish migrants is the fact that Finland has a sizeable national minority of Swedish-speaking Finns living in the coastal regions. Although the proportion of Swedish speakers has steadily diminished in Helsinki, the city still has a relatively large and significant Swedish-speaking minority (Kraus, 2011). In 2018, about 6% of the population of Helsinki (36,000 people) indicated Swedish as their native language, whereas 78% indicated Finnish (Statistics Finland, 2019). There are both private and public institutions and workplaces in Helsinki where Swedish is spoken. However, there is a recognisable difference in accent between the Swedish spoken in Finland and that spoken in Sweden, and in some situations (and jobs) this may play a role in the valuation of language skills.

### 5. The Position of the Swedish Migrants in the Labour Market

As mentioned above, the majority of the interviewees had moved to Finland primarily because of a Finnish spouse, and rarely because of a job. Only a few had a job in Finland when they moved, and even fewer could be characterised as “intra-corporate expatriates” (Camenisch & Suter, 2019), who were posted to Finland by their companies for a certain period of time. Therefore, most of the interviewees had actively to navigate the local labour market to find a job after arriving in the country.

All the interviewees were native speakers of Swedish, with limited or non-existent skills in Finnish. Not surprisingly, they eventually found jobs that did not require a good knowledge of Finnish. Initial occupations tended to have low requirements in terms of skills or assets, so-called entry-level occupations, or the specific skills required corresponded to the national background of the employee, so-called ethno-specific occupations (Fortelius, 2014). This pattern of employment in entry-level and ethno-specific jobs is common among recently arrived migrants in Finland, but the types of occupations available to the Swedes still differed substantially from those available to other migrant groups. There are entry-level jobs in Helsinki that require knowledge of Swedish. Furthermore, because good knowledge of Swedish is relatively rare among local jobseekers, many of the interviewees found employment in specific sectors of the labour market. Examples of such workplaces include Swedish-language day care for children, schools, care units for Swedish-speaking elderly people, cultural institutions, university departments, and some Swedish-owned companies, especially in the financial sector. As the following quotations indicate, there is a large demand for staff in the Swedish-language day-care and public education system:

There are e-mail addresses for all Swedish-language schools and day-care centres in the Helsinki region. So, I simply e-mailed all of them...It only took two hours

for the [current workplace] to call me, and they asked me to come for an interview....I started work three days later....I cannot remember how many of them called me. You know, as I said, I sent [an application] to all Swedish-speaking places, and I do not know if it was like, I think it was thirteen that called. (Peter, aged 28, 3 years in Finland)

Another interviewee, Johan, had less luck with his applications and instead found part-time employment in a Swedish-language afternoon day-care centre. The social capital of the interviewees assumed significance when other forms of capital remained unrecognised. Both Peter and Johan had job contracts that only covered the school year, due to the lack of the formal education required. It was a common pattern among the interviewees to start their first job in Finland on a short-term contract, which was then extended or led to other longer-term positions. Johan continued his struggle to gain access to his preferred field and to utilise competences and job experiences he had gained in Sweden. In the meantime, he utilised his social capital to find a job in children’s day-care. These centres have a predominantly female workforce, thus it could be an advantage to be a male applicant:

And then the [other job] I got through my roommate. [The roommate] said they needed people so then [I] e-mailed and I told them I knew [roommate] and so on, and then I got it. So, actually I have not got a single job that I have applied for, instead I have got jobs through contacts. Exclusively. (Johan, aged 25, 1 year in Finland)

It seemed to be an additional asset, or even a requirement, in some occupations to be from Sweden. It was not only an excellent knowledge of Swedish that was an asset in these ethno-specific occupations, but also a Swedish accent and cultural knowledge of the country. Examples of such employers include private firms offering language courses, interpretation services and general orientation training for cultivating business contacts with Sweden. Several interviewees worked—either self-employed or in the private sector—as translators or as teachers of the Swedish language:

I had never worked as a teacher before. [The advertisement] said that, ok, a teaching degree is positive, but it wasn’t a requirement. The requirement was that you should come from Sweden. And when I got to the interview it was like, no, it’s no problem that you don’t have the education, it’s the social competence [that matters]. (Mikael, aged 30, 1 year in Finland)

As shown in the above quotation, not only did the company want their employees to be fluent in Swedish as a language, it also wanted someone with knowledge of cultural norms and other aspects of Swedish society. The

teacher was expected to pass on his knowledge not only of the Swedish language per se, but also of aspects of Swedish culture:

If nothing else...you have certain knowledge that other Swedish speakers here do not have. You have contacts with Sweden in a totally different way, so for some companies it can be very good....There are very many big enterprises nowadays that are Finnish–Swedish or Nordic, yes [cultural knowledge] can be good. (Mikael, aged 30, 1 year in Finland)

In this case, the interviewee succeeded in finding a job in which his specific cultural capital was not only valued but required. He thus managed to utilise his cultural capital, which in his case was also connected to his educational background. In other cases, the Swedish migrants had to find jobs in areas that did not correspond to their educational background. According to Erel (2010, p. 649), migrants may redefine and recreate forms of migrated cultural capital in order to validate the capital in their countries of residence. Thus, building on the analytical approach outlined by Erel (2010, p. 651), one can argue that the interviewees were able to mobilise their background as Swedish migrants into cultural capital that helped them to gain employment (Fortelius, 2014, pp. 77–78). This capital can be perceived as migrant capital, which they would not have had if they had not moved from Sweden to Finland. Thus, as Swedish migrants the interviewees possessed “embodied cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1986) that was of value on the local labour market in Helsinki. Karin, who had had several different jobs, explained the value of her nationality as follows:

Yes, [to be from Sweden] has always been a benefit for me in the jobs I have had. Yes. I think, as a foreigner in Finland, or if you don’t have Finnish as your native language, the jobs you get, or are involved in, easily can depend on your nationality....I managed to get jobs as a freelance teacher in Swedish, in private language schools. And there were rather many Swedes that got them, that had these jobs. And the job was fun, so I did that for many years. (Karin, aged 45, 16 years in Finland)

As the above examples indicate, some of the interviewees found a job relatively easily. It seems that some of the skills and resources of the Swedish migrants were both recognised and valued in specific fields of the labour market in Helsinki. Although formal education obtained in Sweden could in some cases be devalued or considered insignificant, the migrants usually could rely on other forms of cultural and social capital. The relatively good employment situation is confirmed in official statistics showing a lower level of unemployment among Swedish immigrants than among other immigrant groups in Helsinki, and a level that is comparable to that among Finnish-born Finnish citizens (Saukkonen, 2016).

Some of the interviewees managed to find employment that corresponded to their work experience in Sweden, whereas others were able to enter new occupations because of how their cultural and social capital as Swedish migrants was valued. Thus, the migrant capital of the interviewees was recognised and they were able to mobilise their resources into cultural and social capital in the local labour market. Our results also indicate that, among our interviewees, migrant capital could be utilised to differentiate them from other Swedish speakers in Finland and thus to strengthen their position in the labour market. Several interviewees also stressed their networks in Sweden, which they used in their everyday work:

If it was not for me, there would be significantly less contact with Sweden, I presume. People would first and foremost look for somebody here [in Finland]. And I also support that, but sometimes I think there is a purpose in having like a Swedish-speaking Swedish citizen. But yes, I am the one who deals with 90% of the cases in which Swedes are involved. (Erik, aged 35, 12 years in Finland)

## 6. Navigating the Field of the Labour Market

As the results outlined above indicate, many of the migrants in our study were able to navigate new fields, and to find positions in specific fields where they managed to achieve a positive valuation of their capitals. Our findings also imply that it is not enough to possess resources, they also need to be mobilisable to be considered capital of value. The value of the skills and resources of social actors are never absolute and their “mobilisability” largely depends on the social context of the field (e.g., Anthias, 2007; Wahlbeck, 2018).

In this study, the importance of the social context is exemplified by the fact that the Swedish migrants needed to get information about the labour market to find the right jobs to apply for. From a Bourdieusian perspective, exchanges in social networks can generate social capital, which in turn can be defined as useful connections through which to gain access to the field or to get useful information about the rules of the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Thus, the migrants needed to get information about the specific local jobs and occupations in which their assets could be of value. Not surprisingly, the interviewees strongly stressed the importance of having the right contacts:

Forget about this with education! Because I was very afraid of that at the beginning when I heard that, shit, like, everyone here has a Master’s degree and you won’t get a job unless you have like seven degrees and have all your papers....But this is not the case, it’s contacts, contacts, contacts and personality. (Erik, aged 35, 12 years in Finland)

As the above quotation indicates, social capital is generated by “contacts.” Since most of the interviewees had a Finnish partner, this partner became an important source of social contacts. The interviews revealed that this was the case both for men and for women. In many instances the partner was the first and only contact the interviewee had had with Finland before moving to the country. The partner also provided information about local society, especially immediately after migration when the interviewee had not yet established local social ties of his or her own. For example, Peter (aged 28, 3 years in Finland) explained that the process of integration “was through my wife....She told [me] what there is, like different ways of getting into society here.”

The partners’ social contacts, mostly in the form of friends and family of the partner, were part of broader social networks that provided the migrant with further possibilities to obtain information and navigate the labour market. Swedish migrants affiliated with a Finnish family have, upon arrival, access to well-established social networks upon which they can rely during the initial period in Finland. As the following quotation testifies, partners provided the first local network that the interviewees were able to build upon: “With each passing year, you build on your network through various channels. But in the beginning, I was very very strongly [connected] through my husband” (Eva, aged 38, 8 years in Finland). As a consequence of migration, the social roles played by partners may significantly change depending on the types of social connections that the partners have in the new society of settlement. These changes may involve new internal and external family roles, as described in many studies on changing family dynamics in migration (e.g., Juozeliūnienė & Budginaitė, 2016; Ryan, 2019; Ryan & Mulholland, 2014; Wahlbeck, 2015a). Thus, as Erel and Ryan (2019) point out, not only are individual micro-level migrant strategies situated within wider macro contexts, they are also experienced through and facilitated by the meso-level of families and social networks.

In this study, the partners played a role in providing general information about navigating the labour market, but in the end the outcome, in other words getting or failing to get the job, depended on the valuation of the assets of the applicants themselves. Nevertheless, the social networks of the Finnish partner directed the navigation of the field in different directions depending on the social role and connections that the partner possessed. This may also limit the contacts to specific social networks. In cases where the migrants did not have a Finnish partner to rely on, the process of navigating the field of the labour market became much more difficult. Moreover, the type of social connections of the partner varied depending on whether or not the partner was a member of the local Swedish-speaking community. Johan, for example, who had no contacts with Swedish-speaking Finns, experienced many problems finding a job corresponding to his education:

Johan: But I don’t know, it may be that I have not [found any job] because I don’t speak Finnish, I guess that could be the reason. It may be that they did not even understand my [job] application, because it was not in Finnish, I sent it in English and Swedish.

Sabina: So, you don’t have anybody among your acquaintances with contacts to follow up? Within your [professional] field?

Johan: I have tried to find out if there are, but it seems not....The Finnish-speakers I know have had some information about job vacancies, but they have always been for Finnish speakers, so that has not been of any help. (Johan, aged 25, 1 year in Finland)

As described above, many interviewees experienced problems finding a job because of their lack of knowledge of Finnish. As a consequence, the role of the small Swedish-speaking labour market is easily accentuated among Swedish migrants, who actively use this specific field as a gateway to employment (Fortelius, 2014; Wahlbeck, 2015b). The interviews revealed that social contacts with Swedish-speaking Finns had played an instrumental role in providing information about workplaces in which knowing Swedish would be considered an asset and a lack of knowledge of Finnish would not be a hindrance to employment.

Thus, although social networks play a decisive role in terms of obtaining information and navigating the labour market in Helsinki, the challenge migrants have to overcome is that different networks provide different opportunities in this respect. Thus, migrants need to “develop strategies to access social capital (through networks) and overcome de-skilling by building new cultural capital (credentials) in the destination society” (Erel & Ryan, 2019, p. 259). The strategies that many migrants adopted was to access the social networks of the Swedish-speaking minority and through these networks find the fields in which knowledge of Swedish was valued. As one interviewee explained, when asked what advice should be given to newly arrived Swedes, it was necessary to find the right networks to find a job in Helsinki:

In this case, first try to sort out the terrain of the Swedish-speaking Finns...just to get your foot in the door somewhere, to get into the labour market in some way. In this case I would suggest taking the easy way, maybe it’s not even your dream job, but you still kind of get your foot in, and you become part of the system and things start to roll. And at the same time, they will perhaps offer some further education on something and you can kind of extend your network. I mean, I would never have moved from [an occupation] into [another occupation] in Sweden. But you have to say thank you and carry on. That is what I did, and I think this makes you learn a lot, and about how the system basically works. (Anna, aged 40, 9 years in Finland)



As the above quotation indicates, the community of the Swedish-speaking minority in Helsinki may provide a useful network via which to navigate the labour market. The social ties of the community are strong, and members of the community have information about the jobs in which knowing Swedish is a valued asset. Thus, the Swedish-speaking community was something of a buffer-zone, a touchdown before stepping out into the larger society or labour market (Fortelius, 2014, p. 58).

There was a tendency among the interviewees to become more and more socially involved in the networks of the local Swedish-speaking minority, especially if the spouse or partner belonged to this minority (Wahlbeck, 2015b, pp. 136–166). These social networks were established through personal contacts both at the workplace and in the course of various spare-time activities of the interviewees. Among the families with children, for example, many of the female interviewees (but, interestingly, none of the males) mentioned that social contacts were often established as a consequence of taking part in activities at their children's school. Karin (aged 47, 10 years in Finland) explained that many of her local networks developed through contacts established in connection with the Swedish-language school that her children attended: "so, there are plenty of parents of my children's school friends." In this way, the micro-level social relationships within families contributed to the social networks on the meso-level, which tended to be differentiated by language and concentrated in the networks of the local Swedish-speaking minority. As Erel and Ryan (2019) point out, "child-based sociality" may open up networking possibilities for migrants, but the availability of these types of social network also depends on whether the "migrants' life course is in tune with normative meso-level and macro-level socio-structures" (Erel & Ryan, 2019, p. 259). The normative structures in question may relate to age or social class, for example. The results of our study indicate that this may not only be limited to the age and social class of the migrants, but also extends to the age and social class of the spouse of the migrant, since many networks were accessed with the help of the spouse. In general, the results of our study indicate that there was a wide variation among the interviewees concerning access to and participation in local social networks of potential labour-market relevance.

Although the Swedish-speaking minority provided useful information about available jobs, as a relatively small minority its social networks are limited. Thus, the migrants also strived to gain access to other networks and to a broader labour market than the one offered by the Swedish speakers. Many interviewees perceived the Finnish-speaking society as the final goal of integration, and some even expressed anxiety about the potential limitations of social affiliation with a small national minority. However, lacking knowledge of Finnish was a challenge that both limited social contact with the Finnish-speaking majority and made it difficult to compete for jobs in the general labour market in Helsinki.

Eva expressed this limitation strongly: "It's a never ending scourge, because there are so so many things I could do in Sweden...that I can not do here...because I can only work in English or Swedish." In an attempt to overcome this limitation, most of the interviewees worked hard at learning Finnish, but found it challenging to learn enough to be able to compete for jobs that required a working knowledge of the language. The mobilisability of the cultural capital of the Swedish migrants was limited to specific fields of the local labour market, which highlights the fact that the valuation of capital is connected to and limited by specific social contexts (cf. Anthias, 2007). Yet, in some fields the capital of the migrants is highly valued and the migrants actively develop strategies to identify and navigate these particular fields.

## 7. Conclusion

Our interview study revealed how Swedish migrants with no previous connection to Finland gained access to the local labour market in Helsinki. Labour market integration constitutes a concrete example of the processes whereby migrants enter a new "field" (Bourdieu, 1986). The results confirm that access to social networks is decisive for gaining access to the labour market. The interviewees stressed the importance of contacts in getting information about jobs and how to navigate the local labour market in Helsinki. Thus, access to the specific fields in which the cultural or social capital of the migrants would be highly valued was crucial. Information about and access to jobs in which knowledge of Swedish was an asset turned out to be critical in this respect. Thus, contacts with members of the Swedish-speaking minority in Helsinki turned out to be especially valuable in finding these specific jobs.

Most of the interviewees had a Finnish spouse, since the spouse often was the reason for moving to Finland. The results indicate that the social networks of the Finnish spouse were decisive in terms of the types of jobs the migrants found out about. In practice, the native language of the spouse—the Finnish majority language or the Swedish minority language—tended to have a major impact on the social networks that the migrant would learn about and would be able to access. The social networks of the Finnish spouse were especially relevant to the migrants during the period immediately after their arrival in Finland, but after some time they became less dependent on their spouses and usually managed to gain a foothold in the general labour market. Eventually, their skills and assets could be highly valued on the local labour market.

Thus, the Swedish migrants we interviewed were relatively successful in entering the local labour market. However, the field in question makes a difference, as it was clearly easier to get some jobs than other jobs. The migrants were able to find jobs in occupations in which knowledge of Swedish language and culture was considered a form of capital. Other occupations were more dif-

ficult to access and demanded social capital to compensate for the lack of sufficient knowledge of the Finnish language. Our results indicate that the resources that migrants possess also need to be mobilisable in the fields that are of significance for the social position of the migrants (cf. Anthias, 2007; Wahlbeck, 2018). Resources are not simply carried by migrants into a new social field, the value of a resource depending both on how migrants are able actively to validate the capital and the significance of power relations and social structures in this process. Thus, our results support the Bourdieusian approach to migrant capital, in which migrants are seen as social actors who actively create new capital and validation mechanisms (Erel, 2010).

Furthermore, the process of validating capital is a multi-level process, involving both individual agency on the micro-level, the utilisation of family networks on the meso-level, and navigating the opportunity structure provided on the macro level of economic structures (Erel & Ryan, 2019). Thus, our multi-level analysis of the strategies of the Swedish migrants indicates that individual agency is needed to navigate the fields in which migrant capital can be mobilised. For example, knowledge of Swedish language and culture constitutes embodied cultural capital, but only in specific jobs and occupations. On the meso level, the social networks of families and the local Swedish-speaking minority can provide useful information about job opportunities, but access to these networks may depend on the age of the migrant and the social ties of the Finnish spouse of the migrant, for example. Finally, valuation of the migrant capital in question may depend on economic and political changes on the macro level, such as the extent of trade and business contacts between Finland and Sweden.

A Bourdieusian perspective on capital is useful in that it highlights the dynamic processes involved when migrants validate various forms of capital in a new field. The perspective captures the processes and variations in the mobilisability of capital that migrants experience. In this article we have used the experiences of Swedish migrants on a specific local labour market to describe the utilisation of various forms of capital, which exemplifies general processes of social inclusion in a new field. Although migrants may find it a challenge to utilise their resources in a new field, they are also able to generate and mobilise new forms of cultural and social capital. These capitals constitute a specific migrant capital that is mobilisable only because the migrants have moved to a new field. Thus, the concept of migrant capital captures both the agency of the migrants as well as the structural constraints of the field in which various forms of capital are generated and utilised.

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### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

# Locating Forced Migrants' Resources: Residency Status and the Process of Family Reunification in Finland

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## Abstract

This article investigates how forced migrants residing in Finland utilise different types of resources in their efforts to reunite with their families. The data includes 36 group and individual interviews (2018–2019) with 43 Iraqi, Afghan, Somali, and Ethiopian forced migrants holding residence permits in Finland, who were either seeking to reunite with their families, or had already brought their families to Finland, or had attempted but failed to achieve family reunification. The results show that a variety of resources are needed to navigate the bureaucracies involved in family reunification. Economic resources in one's country of origin may be used to pay the high administrative and travel costs, as well as other fees required by government officials to obtain visas for family members. Cultural resources, such as education, are useful when one is trying to make sense of the complicated application process, or seeking work or educational opportunities in the new country. Different forms of social resources can be utilised to seek advice. However, the resources at the disposal of migrants are not the determining factor in attempts to successfully reunite with one's family. Although they are important, the success of the reunification process depends more on one's residency status and whether it allows family reunification without a high-income requirement.

## Keywords

family migration; family reunification; forced migration; income requirements; social capital

## Issue

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## 1. Introduction

Temporal and spatial disconnections from home and intimate relations, together with the absence of family members, are inseparable from the phenomenon of forced migration. However, knowledge about family separation of forced migrants is mostly situated within psychology and trauma studies. These scholars suggest that family separation can have long-lasting effects, which include a variety of post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms (Nickerson, Bryant, Steel, Silove, & Brooks, 2010; Rousseau, Mekki-Berrada, & Moreau, 2001), depression, anxiety, and insomnia (Rousseau, Rufagari, Bagilishya, & Measham, 2004; Wilmsen, 2013). It has also been reported that family separation hinders migrants from settling into their new country (Choummanivong, Poole, &

Cooper, 2014). In addition, another strand of research has dealt with actors who implement family reunification policies (Eggebo, 2013; Pellander, 2015), and legislation by national and international courts (de Hart, 2007; Mustasaari, 2016). There is a gap in research in the area of migrants' own strategies for coping with family separation, and the administrative structures that help or hinder these processes. This article examines how forced migrants utilise various types of resources in their efforts to reunite with their families. I argue that the acquisition and utilization of capitals may be different when migration happens due to conflict or other life-threatening circumstances.

As a consequence of the financial crisis in Europe, discourse on migrants as 'welfare expenditure' has shifted the discussion away from human rights con-

cerns (Kofman, 2018). Several new restrictions within immigration legislation have been made across Europe, and Finland is no exception. The most significant change affecting refugees' and forced migrants' family lives in Finland happened in 2016, when the high-income limit was applied to migrants receiving international protection.

In principle, once a forced migrant receives a residence permit in Finland, he or she is eligible for family reunification. However, following an increase in the number of asylum seekers arriving in Finland in 2015–2016, the country adopted a number of restrictive migration policies, including several new restrictions on family reunification. For instance, with effect from 1 July 2016, Finland extended the income requirement for family reunification, also applying it to migrants who received a category of residency called subsidiary protection, regardless of their age. One category of protection—humanitarian grounds—was omitted completely from the legislation.

At present, forced migrants are granted one of four different categories of residency in Finland: refugee (asylum); subsidiary protection; compassionate grounds; or residency based on being a victim of human trafficking. Additionally, some may apply for other statuses, for example based on work or study. However, none of the migrants in this research had such statuses (except for residency based on family relationships, which the transnational families of the 'sponsoring' migrants would receive), and no participants had residency based on being a victim of human trafficking. According to current Finnish legislation, migrants receiving their residency based on subsidiary protection or compassionate grounds have to fulfil specified income requirements. Furthermore, those with refugee status (asylum) on the grounds of persecution need to demonstrate they have a high level of income, if their application is not submitted within three-months of receiving residency. The monthly income requirement for someone with refugee status to bring a spouse and two children to Finland is 2600 euros after taxes, which corresponds to a monthly salary of almost 4000 euros. This figure is more than the average Finnish income, and is the highest<sup>1</sup> income requirement in comparison to other Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark).

Unlike many European countries, and all the other Nordic countries, Finland also requires migrants' transnational families, who are seeking residency through family reunification, to travel to an interview in a specific country instead of giving individuals a choice of interview locations and allowing them to decide. This is not an issue for those migrants who have a functioning Finnish Embassy in their country of citizenship but is a huge problem for those who do not; for example, Afghan migrants (many of whom live in Iran) have to travel to New Delhi, India, for this purpose. This detail in current Finnish pol-

icy makes family reunification impossible for many, who simply cannot arrange travel to the interviews.

In view of the difficulties highlighted above, this article focuses on how forced migrants residing in Finland utilise different types of resources in their efforts to reunite with their families. The data in this study includes 36 group and individual interviews with 43 forced migrants from Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Ethiopia. All the interviewees are living in Finland. Their families are either already in Finland, or waiting abroad to be able to move to Finland. The distinction between 'forced' and 'voluntary' migration is often a blurred one. Many who, at first, seek asylum might later attempt to acquire a work- or study-related residence permit (see Erdal & Oeppen, 2018). However, the participants are referred to as 'forced migrants' to stress the specific circumstances faced by those who seek asylum and are granted international protection (in Finland: asylum, subsidiary protection) or other humanitarian residence permits (in Finland: compassionate grounds, victim of human trafficking).

## 2. Migrants' Resources and Family Migration

This article investigates the role of migrants' capital in family migration and particularly in family reunification processes. I focus on the kinds of resources that migrants draw upon to enable them to live together with their families, or even simply be able to start the process of family reunification. 'Resources' in this article are understood to be much the same as capitals, which Bourdieu (1986, 1987) divides into economic, cultural, and social. In this section, I will draw on Bourdieu's theory of capitals and, particularly, show how the theory can be applied to understanding migrants' resources. Economic capital, according to Bourdieu (1986), refers to financial possibilities and differential (often generationally accumulated) wealth. Cultural capital most often comprises forms of education and knowledge regarding different cultural products and arts.

Social capital is perhaps the most studied form of capital in migration studies (Ryan, Erel, & D'Angelo, 2015). It refers to the diverse social bonds that people accumulate and through which various benefits and values may be created. Migration scholars have especially analysed social networks (e.g., Koser & Pinkerton, 2002; Lyytinen & Kullenberg, 2015) and made significant contributions in understanding the different types of social capital migrants possess, such as bridging and bonding social capital (see Putnam, 2000). These studies offer insights into the accumulation, conversion, and utilisation of social capital by migrant communities. For example, Katila and Wahlbeck (2012) suggest that successful migrant business owners combine the resources available through Finnish and co-ethnic social ties, as well as local and transnational ties.

<sup>1</sup> Based on the website of the Swedish Migration Agency, The Danish Immigration Service, The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, and the Finnish Immigration Service, as of October 2019.

However, in migration studies, as Anthias and Cederberg (2009) suggest, social capital works slightly differently than in other sociological analyses. Migrants may have significant networks which offer certain benefits, such as esteem or practical assistance, but these networks do not always produce value in a way that would generate worth in a specific field, such as in a particular society (see also Anthias, 2007). Being able to transfer different capitals into 'symbolic capital'—a legitimized and recognized form of capital, a source of value in a specific field (see Skeggs, 1997)—is an essential aspect of different capitals in Bourdieu's (1987) theory. Anthias and Cederberg (2009) resolve this issue of non-transferrable migrant capital by naming migrant social capital a 'resource' rather than capital. I also use the term resource throughout this article to stress the temporary nature not only of social capital, but forced migrants' different beneficial networks, wealth, or education, for example.

Capitals are always produced and processed within a specific 'field' and their utilization might not be transferred to another field. However, Bourdieu distinguishes symbolic capital as a specific type of capital, which is formed from other capitals, but can be 'exchanged' between the fields (see Thomson, 2008). Economic capital, for example, may in many cases be used to purchase other types of capital, such as education. In this study, 'field' refers to the process of family reunification that the interviewed migrants aim to achieve.

In Bourdieu's work, it is essential to understand that although the capitals are very concrete, they are also 'embodied' (Bourdieu, 1986). Possessing different embodied capitals influences the way in which a person understands him/herself and the world around him/her. Cultural capital, for example, influences embodied dispositions, which have a bearing on where one feels at home—whether that be at a car dealership or a cocktail party. Feminist scholars have developed some of the core ideas of capital theory to intersectionally understand the experiences and choices of, for example, working class women (see Skeggs, 1997, 2004). Recently, a number of migration scholars have advanced this strand of social stratification theory (e.g., Anthias, 2012; Anthias & Cederberg, 2009; Ryan et al., 2015), but the theoretical developments of intersectional social stratification theory have rarely focused on the specifics of forced migration as a significant issue (for example, Cederberg, 2015; Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2017).

Although feminist scholars working with capital theories have not fully discussed forced migration, many migration scholars have analysed migrant capital or resources at different stages of the (forced) migratory journey. For example, migrants' decision-making regarding migration destinations has been widely studied. Crawley and Hagen-Zanker (2019, p. 11) suggest that individual socio-economic characteristics shape the destinations that 'are, and are not, available to people.' So rather than relying on knowledge of migration policies in different countries, migrants' paths are mainly shaped by individ-

ual resources, such as existing social networks in particular countries, previous education, and language skills (e.g., Richardson, 2010; Valenta & Thorshaug, 2012).

Also, family migration has not been much studied within capital theory. Della Puppa's (2018) study is an exception. It suggests that migrant families are continuously struggling to be able to stay together. The study found that especially social and mobility capital are useful in dealing with precarious residency and the uncertainty of being able to stay together as a family. Eleonore Kofman (2018) compared migrants' economic capital in connection with the fulfilment of income requirements in the Netherlands, Norway, and the UK. She found that those without sufficient economic capital to meet the income requirements may use cultural capital to facilitate the development of coping strategies to overcome or reduce the duration of family separation. This article builds on and extends the previous scholarship by investigating the utilisation of existing resources of forced migrants with different residency categories in Finland. Given that there is limited scholarship on forced migrants' strategies in trying to fulfil the requirements of family reunification, this article points to directions for future research in how forced migrants utilize their existing resources. In addition to the often-described income and housing requirements, this article aims to also reveal the structural barriers—especially relevant to forced migrants who come from countries where there is on-going conflict—which, in practice, often make it impossible to even submit the application for family reunification.

### 3. Interviews with Forced Migrants

The interviews in this study were conducted during 2018–2019 and consist of 36 group and individual interviews, either with the participants alone or with the participants and their family members. These semi-structured interviews involved 43 forced migrants altogether (27 who arrived as adults and 16 who came as minors). Of the interviewees, 28 were men and 15 were women. One family was interviewed twice. The interviewees had lived in Finland for between one and eight years. The ages of the interviewees ranged from 17 to 61 years. In the following analysis, I will call the young migrants who had initially arrived as minors 'unaccompanied minors,' even though most of the interviewees were over 18 at the time of the interview. The unaccompanied minors had arrived in Finland when they were between 12 and 16 years old. The interviewees were from Afghanistan (32), Iraq (8), Somalia (2), and Ethiopia (1). Since the research assistants on the project, who had helped to recruit interviewees, belonged to Afghan, Iranian, and Iraqi diasporas, the number of Afghan and Iraqi interviewees was the highest. The interviews were conducted in Finnish, English, Dari, or Arabic, depending on the participants' language skills.

The main guiding ethical principle in this study was to 'do no harm,' following the Oxford Refugee Studies

Centre's (2007) guidelines. However, recent refugee scholars have highlighted the need for a more reciprocal relationship with research participants. Instead of 'stealing stories,' scholars themselves should seek to benefit the vulnerable group (Krause, 2017; Mackenzie, McDowell, & Pittaway, 2007). These issues were addressed in this study on the micro level by guiding the participants towards non-governmental organisations and officials who could help them with their often-complicated family reunification processes. On the macro level, the project team has actively engaged in the societal discussion about family reunification policies by stressing the effects of tightened policies on refugees' lives. The project plan, interview questions, consent form and other relevant documents were reviewed by the Ethics Committee of the University of Turku before the data collection (in Spring 2018). For the interviews with minors who were still living in a group home for young people, a separate research permit was sought from the group home, in addition to the consent of the interviewees themselves. All the identifying information, such as cities of origin, places of work, or specific attributable circumstances have been omitted from the interview quotations. The interviewees' names are pseudonyms.

The translated and transcribed data is kept on my password-protected computer. After the project ends, most of the data will be stored on the Finnish Social Science Data Archive to enable further use. The data has been arranged thematically to represent the different phases, or in some cases outcomes, of the family reunification processes, and the resources about which migrants spoke in connection with the different phases. The data was coded manually. Table 1 represents the resources, which each of the 35 families in the study had at their disposal (note that one family was interviewed twice, so the data includes 36 interviews).

As can be seen from Table 1, the families who were reunited had significantly more resources. The resource categories refer to 'minor economic' resources, when the family had some possessions (e.g., jewellery or a car), which they had been able to sell to fund their application fees and family's travel to interviews. 'Major economic' resources meant that the family was wealthy and was able to pay the fees without any difficulty or having to sell all their possessions. 'Cultural' resources refer to education, or a distinguished position as an artist. The families who had 'social' resources were able to draw on support from networks of people to keep their families

safe. Finally, the category of 'acquired' refers to new social networks in Finland, who were able to either support the well-being of the 'sponsoring' migrant in Finland, or even in some cases help in the actual process of applying for family reunification.

#### 4. Migrant Resources and Family Reunification

##### 4.1. Families Reunited

Of the 35 families interviewed, only 11 had been successful in reuniting with their families; 12 had received negative initial decisions and were now awaiting the results of their appeals from the Administrative or Supreme Administrative Courts; and 12 had been refused at all court levels, or had not even been able to submit an application. The participants who had been successful in their applications either had at least some economic capital, or had arrived in Finland prior to the introduction of more stringent administrative barriers in recent years, such as the income requirement for family reunification for people who are granted subsidiary protection (brought into effect in 2016) and the requirement that one has to reside legally in the country where the application is submitted (brought into effect in 2011). In connection to the latter requirement, the main hardship that interviewees mentioned was that they could not acquire travel documents to go to the specific embassy assigned to them according to their country of birth. For example, Afghans living (or even born) in Iran could not submit their applications to the Finnish Embassy in Tehran, Iran, although Iranians were able to apply to this embassy for their family reunification. Instead Afghans living in Iran had to arrange travel to India in order to be interviewed, which required them first to travel to Afghanistan to attain the travel documents for going to India. Needless to say, this was impossible for many as they could not safely travel to Afghanistan.

The participants who had been successful in their applications were all recognised as refugees, so they were exempt from the high-income requirement if they submitted their application within the three-month time limit. In practice, the time limit had often been longer if the participants had been able to explain why they could not meet it. It is essential to note that no one in this study would have been able to reunite with their family if the income requirement had applied to them. So, rather than resources, one's grounds for residency and ability

**Table 1.** Resources of forced migrants attempting family reunification.

Stage of application	Minor economic	Major economic	Cultural	Social	Acquired
Reunited (11)	5	3	4	7	4
Waiting (12)	1	1	1	6	8
Risk of permanent separation (12)	—	1	—	2	10

Note: N, families = 35.



to apply without demonstrating a high income seemed to be decisive regarding who was able to bring their family to Finland.

All but one of the research participants' families had had to travel to interviews in a country which was not their country of residence. The interviewees had all had major difficulties arranging their families' travel. The Iraqis in this study described that their families had not been granted visas to submit their applications in Ankara, Turkey, which was their designated embassy. The families had to go through hardships to be able to travel, first to identify themselves at the embassy and later to be interviewed. At least two trips had been necessary, and in some cases they had to make the journey three times. A few families had stayed in Turkey to await the results of the process, but the stays had been expensive and their visas had run out before their cases were resolved. All of these arrangements required huge sums of money, and among the Iraqi participants it was most often the father who resided alone in Finland and arranged to pay the costs. Many fathers took out large loans from their friends to accommodate this.

The data only included one family from Somalia. This family had also had great difficulties travelling to the embassy in Ethiopia, where they were initially denied entry because the embassy refused to accept their Somali passports as identification. The one Ethiopian family in this study was the only one that had been able to submit their application without serious hardship, since the embassy was within the same country. Similarly, one Afghan family had been able to travel to Tehran for the interviews with only minor difficulties, because they had submitted their application in Iran before a policy change that required Afghans to submit their applications in New Delhi, India. Most other Afghans in the study had been unable to even start their processes, since travelling to India was impossible for these often-undocumented families. For an Afghan family living as forced migrants in Iran, for example, submitting the application would have meant first going back to Afghanistan and arranging *tazkiras* (Afghan birth certificates) and passports. Then they would have to put large sums of money into a bank account so as to be able to acquire a visa to India. Finally, the family would have had to travel from Afghanistan to India several times for identification and interviews, or arrange to stay in New Delhi for the duration of the application process. Most of these steps were impossible for poor families, which often consisted of single mothers with children. Others with more resources had managed to arrange the process, but were often in huge debt after paying all the costs.

Reza, a 45-year-old man from Afghanistan, was one of the few who had succeeded in his application process. He had arrived in Finland in 2015 and been granted asylum quite quickly, within only 10 months. Like many of the migrants who had successfully reunited with their families, Reza came from a wealthy family and had economic resources; he had been able to sell his house

in Afghanistan to cover the family reunification costs. However, his family had faced several hardships during the process. One difficulty was the dangerous journey to the government office to deal with the paperwork, such as legalising the marriage documents and getting passports to travel to the interview. Reza explains that during his family's travels, 'on some occasions, there was 10-minute difference between them and a suicide attack.' However, Reza's former social position and his networks in Afghanistan enabled him to find a man he could hire to travel with the family back and forth to India:

We didn't have a problem with the interview in India, but the problem was the number of times the family had to go back and forth. Getting Indian visas was very hard, and the process financially heavy. For example, the Indian embassy in Afghanistan has given the visa process to a company with strict regulations. Every person needs to have bank statement showing that they have 1000 euros in their account, and the money has to have been in the account six months before. Most people in Afghanistan do not have 1000 euros in their bank account.

Due to such impossible requirements, even Reza—a man with many resources—had difficulties in acquiring a visa for India. In addition, he had to pay extra fees to corrupt government officials to obtain passports and other documents for the application. It can be argued that the impossible administrative barriers created by the Finnish immigration policy (such as not being able to submit one's application at the nearest embassy), feed exploitation and even the criminal behaviour of corrupted officials. Reza's case was not exceptional. Many interviewees described how they had significant difficulties in acquiring visas for travel, although they all had valid reasons for travelling to the family reunification interviews. Travel was also extremely dangerous for some interviewees. A 37-year-old Afghan man, Asghar, described how the security situation in Afghanistan made it very difficult to go through with the process:

I had to re-book the appointment four times in the embassy [in New Delhi] and they were wondering why I did this. One time the Taliban bombed the airport and the ticket that I bought for 1300 dollars went to waste. The flight was cancelled....When there was a suicide attack, the offices were closed for two months and no-one was working there or going there. They were saying: 'Come next week, next month.' There was a lot of trouble.

Asghar's wife managed to pay for travel to the interviews, and to hire a translator to accompany her, with the money she got from selling her jewellery. However, these economic resources did not shield the family from the effects of the insecure situation in Afghanistan. The procedure of acquiring documents and travelling to the

several interviews in India had been an enormous struggle for Asghar's family.

It was common that the families who had been reunited had exhausted all their economic resources in the process. One Iraqi man, Ali, came from a wealthy family and had been well-off in Iraq working as a high government official. Being college-educated, he had cultural resources in the form of language skills and knowledge of government procedures. He had sold his house and all of his possessions to enable the lengthy family reunification process. Nonetheless, he ended up 8000 euros in debt and without any of his former possessions left. He had exhausted all of his resources, and the family was now living on small state subsidies while he struggled to save money to repay the loans.

Ali's, Asghar's, and Reza's cases are similar to those of the other forced migrants who have been able to reunite with their families. Firstly, they had all been exempt from the income requirement, which seemed to be decisive as to whether the process was possible at all. In addition to grounds for residency, all but one family had economic resources as well as social resources in the form of networks in the country of origin. The one family that had very little resources had been reunited before the 2011 legislative change which decreed that families had to start their applications abroad and that Afghans had to apply from India. The participants also often shared the experience that their possessions and wealth had been exhausted during the process, so when their families finally reached Finland, their economic resources were gone and could not be used to help build a new life in Finland.

#### 4.2. *The Wait*

Of those involved in the study, 17 participants were still awaiting final decisions on appeals against the rejection of their applications. A number of scholars have found that long waiting periods in connection with asylum applications and family reunification are detrimental to refugees' well-being (e.g., Leinonen & Pellander, in press; Vitus, 2010), and the participants in this study were no exception. They all spoke about serious mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression, and insomnia, and in two cases the participants had even attempted suicide after learning of the negative decisions on their applications.

Ahmed, a 35-year-old college-educated man from Iraq, had received his residence permit on the basis of subsidiary protection. He had been well-off in Iraq, and he had some savings as well as property. However, his economic resources did not help him with his family reunification application in Finland, as the Immigration Office required him to show proof of a high salary. His subsidiary protection status meant that he had to show he was earning 2900 euros after tax for his application to reunite with his wife and three small children to be successful.

Ahmed's initial application had been declined as at the time he had only had one job, which provided him with a little over 1000 euros per month after tax. He had appealed this and had managed to acquire a second job giving him a total income of a little over 2000 euros per month after tax, thus closer to the required income. However, his two jobs made it difficult for Ahmed to find time to rest. He started his job as a postman at midnight and finished at around 5 am. His second job started at 8 am and lasted until 4.30 pm. He only had a couple hours in between to eat and sleep. He was exhausted during our interview, but he wanted to share his story. In the following extract, I have just asked Ahmed about the consequences of the failed family reunification process:

They prevented me from living my normal life....I don't know what I am going to do more than that. There are no more things to be done than having two jobs. Is there something more I could do? You are a Finn, and this is your mother tongue, and as you can see it is clear that I speak neither Finnish nor English, only a little bit. How could I earn that amount of money to bring my family?

Ahmed had economic and social resources, which had helped him to arrange for his family to travel to the interview in Ankara with ease. He had also rented a house for his family so that they could safely await the decision in Turkey. He had friends in Turkey who were taking care of his family while they were waiting there. However, at the time of our interview, the family's visas were due to expire, since the application process had been much longer than he had anticipated. He told us that he had exhausted his economic resources in arranging for longer visas, and his social resources in trying to find places for his family to stay. He now felt hopeless in terms of keeping his family safe. So, for Ahmed, neither having access to economic nor social resources had been enough to bring his family to safety. Moreover, although Ahmed himself possessed cultural resources in the form of education, he explained that his children had not been able to go to school for a full year. This was a source of great despair to him. 'The hopes they had, the Finnish language that they started to learn since they were in Iraq, everything has gone, their future has been ruined,' Ahmed said.

Like Ahmed, Mohammed was another 35-year-old Iraqi father of three. He was awaiting a decision on family reunification while his wife and three children were stuck in a refugee camp. Mohammed also had received residency on the basis of subsidiary protection and was required to have a high income for family reunification. Recently, his father had threatened to kill Mohammed's wife and children because Mohammed had converted to Christianity. The family had had to flee Iraq, where they had initially been living while awaiting Mohammed's asylum decision and the possibility to join him in Finland. Unlike Ahmed, Mohammed had no resources to help his



wife and three children in their flight. He described the family as sick and living in extremely poor conditions, which was a source of great distress to him. He felt that he had failed as a father and a man. He was unable to read and write in his native tongue and had not been able to get a job, so he had very few resources to influence the situation. He said that he had already tried to commit suicide and saw no purpose in living:

It is not just difficult. Death is better. It is better because they forget about you when you die. What's the meaning of your life when your children are away and your wife is away, and you are disconnected? What is the meaning of life in that case, or what kind of future?

All participants, regardless of the resources available to them, were in a state of high anxiety. This was the case for those from families with status and wealth, as much as for those who were illiterate and had no money. The decisive factor in a prolonged wait seemed to be one's grounds for residency, rather than access to resources. The amount of resources became an important factor only in cases where the forced migrants had received formal refugee status, which enabled family reunification without the high-income requirement. Although reunification was difficult or near impossible even for those with refugee status, other statuses made it entirely impossible for the participants in this study. However, as the examples of Ahmed and Mohammed show, economic, cultural, and social resources played a part in how participants were able to at least make some attempt to fulfil the income requirements and arrange for their families' safety in transit countries. Nonetheless, regardless of resources, the border regime separated families on the basis of mere administrative categories.

#### 4.3. Risk of Permanent Separation

Eleven of the participants were facing the risk of permanent family separation. Most of these participants (8) were unaccompanied minors whose single mothers and younger siblings were living in Iran as undocumented migrants. These families had no possibilities to obtain the documentation needed for passports, or the economic resources for travel. Many of the unaccompanied minors' families had not even submitted an application because their chances of getting to the interview were so slim.

I interviewed only a few adults whose applications had been already denied at all the different court levels. Two families were UNHCR-resettled refugees who had already lived in Finland for several years. These were single mothers who had applied for the father to join the family. In both cases, the father had later followed the family to Finland as an asylum seeker but had not received asylum or residency based on family reunification. Both of the fathers had escaped deportation and were in hiding at the time of our interviews. One Somali family, whose father

and oldest daughter were living in Finland, had tried to reunite with the mother and five younger children who were living in a refugee camp in a transit country, but their application had failed due to some perceived contradictions in the family members' stories. One man had tried to reunite with his mother, who was alone and in ill health living as a refugee in Turkey, but he had failed to prove her total dependency on him. All of these families shared a background of extreme poverty.

Although the suffering caused by permanent separation was devastating and had caused many of the participants severe hardship, the young unaccompanied minors in particular had been able to regain some agency after first grieving over their circumstances. Many wanted to devote their lives to improving their families' situations. One unaccompanied minor, Hamid, now 20 years old, was making plans to secure his family's residency in Turkey after his application had failed at the Finnish Immigration Service and Administrative Court. He had now abandoned his dreams of high education and was working in construction so as to be able to save for a house for his family:

I have searched a lot. In Turkey, if someone can buy a house in Turkey, they give a residence permit to all of your family members. I am trying to make my job permanent, so as to be able to get a loan from a bank and buy a house there. And when they get to stay there, I also most probably will have been able to get my citizenship. I would be able to go there or come back whenever I want, without any problem.

The unaccompanied minors, who had come to Finland often without ever going to school, and thus were unable to read or write, had been able to acquire cultural resources through schooling in Finland. This had had an impact on what they now desired for their families. Hassan, a 19-year-old Afghan boy, felt strongly that he wanted to lift his siblings out of poverty and illiteracy:

I am worried for my sister and brother now, because everyone in the new generation is literate. I want them to have a future. My brother is a tailor [in a sweatshop]. I do not want him to be a tailor in the future. Even if he becomes a tailor, I want him to at least to be literate. I want him to have an understanding, because everything is more difficult for illiterates. It is difficult to live, to continue their lives. For example, if they have children, they don't know how to raise them.

Since Hassan's family did not have the *tazkiras* that are needed for passports, and had no way of travelling to India, they had not even tried to submit an application to reunite the family. Instead, he wanted to start providing for his family so that they could rise from poverty and his siblings could avoid sharing his own fate of illiteracy. Hassan had very little previously acquired resources, but

he had been able to gain cultural resources through his schooling in Finland.

The families in the study who faced permanent separation all shared a background of poverty and had very little in the way of previously acquired resources. While the adults facing permanent separation were often desperate, the unaccompanied minors did have hopes and dreams. Most of the participants who had arrived as unaccompanied minors had acquired significant new cultural and social resources in Finland, and all had hopes of bettering their families' lives with their new resources. However, both the adults facing permanent separation and the unaccompanied minors alike were often the main providers for their transnational families. This created significant difficulties in building a new life in Finland.

## 5. Conclusion

This article investigated forced migrants' resources in connection with possibilities to reunite with their families. Utilizing Bourdieu's theory of capitals in analysing different types of resources, I have investigated the process of family reunification as the 'field' in which different resources may or may not be of value. I use the concept of resources instead of capital, since the forced migrants in this study were able to use various economic, cultural, and social assets in their family reunification processes, but these resources were not necessarily transferrable into valuable symbolic capital (see also Anthias & Cederberg, 2009).

The most striking finding in this study is that the migrants, who had been successful in their family reunification, had all received a formal refugee status (asylum). Family reunification was not attainable for those with other statuses. The refugee status exempted the interviewees from the high-income requirement and thus enabled them to have a chance to reunite with their families. It was in these instances that social class became a factor in the process. Those participants who had significant capital were the ones who were successful in the process. Vulnerable migrants without education and economic resources struggled enormously, even with the refugee status.

Since family migration scholarship has been focused on other migration patterns, such as labour migration, the specific features of forced migration and family relationships have not been widely investigated. Forced migrants face great difficulties in finding jobs to fulfil the income requirements. Their transnational social ties are also often weak or completely severed. Countries from which migrants are forced to leave also often suffer from corruption. These issues hinder the fulfilling of requirements, arranging the application process and attaining the needed documents for the family to travel. This makes the effect of the residency status (whether this exempts them from income requirements or not) stand out as a decisive factor in a successful process.

However, social, cultural, and economic resources did influence the way in which participants were able to navigate the complicated process if they had refugee status. This study did not fully discuss how different capitals influenced the ways in which forced migrants were able to build their lives after facing permanent family separation. It is presumed that different capitals influence this process greatly.

The analysis shows that economic resources—in the form of property which one could sell, or savings which could be used to cover the costs of the expensive applications—were the most essential for reuniting with one's family if the 'sponsoring' migrant had refugee status in Finland. Cultural resources were important for trying to make sense of the complicated application process, and for finding work or educational possibilities in the new country. Social resources in the country of origin, or countries along the way, proved to be useful for making complicated arrangements for the transnational family's safety. The different resources were also intertwined: Having cultural resources meant that one consequently had wider networks of influential people in the country of origin. This was also connected with having more economic resources to draw on, in the form of either access to loans or one's own wealth.

The group of interviewees who were facing the risk of permanent family separation had very few existing resources before migration. Most of them were unaccompanied minors. They were often unable to read and write in their native tongue, or had very limited education, and their families lived in poverty. It could be argued that the current legislation and the actual administrative procedure fails to protect the most vulnerable forced migrants' family lives.

The literature on migrant capital suggests, for example, that migration results in new ways of producing cultural capital. Research suggests that migrant capital builds on power relations of both the country of origin or the country of migration (Erel, 2010), and social capital is formed through both host society's and co-ethnic social ties (Katila & Wahlbeck, 2013). The participants in this study utilized a variety of resources to advance their goal of reuniting with their families. However, the fate of the migrants in this study was wrapped around their immigration status in a way which often sealed their destinies. The 'waiting' category, which I investigated in this article, included wealthy migrants with economic, social, and cultural capital as well as migrants with almost no capital at all. So, while economic capital and other capitals were certainly useful in many ways, they are not the most significant factor in these cases.

This article aimed to provide an overall analysis of the situation of forced migrants' struggles for family reunification in Finland. Further studies are needed to shed light on how migrants cope with prolonged family separation and how (if at all) the acquisition and usage of migrant capital is connected to coping with permanent family separation.

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## Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

# **Syrian Refugee Entrepreneurship in Turkey: Integration and the Use of Immigrant Capital in the Informal Economy**

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## **Abstract**

This study focuses on small-scale entrepreneurship of Syrian refugees in Turkey. It analyses in a Bourdieusian way how they utilize cultural, social, economic and symbolic capital, and reveals their start-up and sustainability strategies. It is based on 24 in-depth interviews with Syrian small entrepreneurs who started up new businesses after 2011, in Istanbul, Gaziantep, and Hatay. It describes the entrepreneurial opportunity structure and the significance of the informal economy and analyses Syrians' utilization of various forms of capital in small entrepreneurship and relations to integration. The main finding indicates that the informal economy—as the main site of such entrepreneurship—eases the start-up process but limits on-going business and integration.

## **Keywords**

entrepreneurship; informal economy; integration; refugees; social capital; Syrian refugees; Turkey

## **Issue**

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## **1. Introduction**

The article examines the small-scale refugee entrepreneurship of Syrians in three Turkish cities and its relations to integration. As of 2019, the war in Syria is in its eighth year. Syrian refugees have fled to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. The majority, 3.6 million, have been staying in Turkey with temporary protection status (General Directorate of Migration Management [DGMM], 2019). The forced migration of Syrians has challenged host countries economically and socially and their prolonged stay has caused the emergence of integration as a policy issue. Syrian asylum to neighbouring countries has been investigated mainly through socio-economic themes such as government expenditure, unemployment rates and inflation (Bizri, 2017). The recent literature has focused on the labour market effects and humanitarian difficulties faced by Syrian immigrants in Turkey. Integration has only recently been rising on the scholarly and political agenda for Syrians in Turkey, who have long been termed ‘guests.’ Despite the im-

portance attributed to economic aspects, such as the cost of welfare benefits (Kızılay, 2019) and crowding-out effects on the labour market (Ceritoğlu, Yunculer, Torn, & Tumen, 2017) in debates about migration policy and integration, refugee entrepreneurship remains a rather understudied topic. This article contributes to filling this gap by combining findings from field research and knowledge of the international literature on refugee entrepreneurship underlining its importance for integration (Bizri, 2017; Kloosterman, 2010) and of case studies on Syrian entrepreneurs in Lebanon (Alexandre, Salloum, & Alalam, 2019), Jordan (Refai, Haloub, & Lever, 2018), the UK (Mawson & Kasem, 2019) and Turkey (Shneikat & Alrawadieh, 2019). This inquiry into the Turkish case also contributes to the literature by pointing out the effects of the informal economy to debates about refugee entrepreneurship and integration.

This study focuses on the utilization of forms of capital (understood in a Bourdieusian sense) in the case of Syrian small entrepreneurs in Turkey and aims to explore the relations between these entrepreneurs in two spe-



cific realms of integration: relations with the state and with the market. It is based on 24 in-depth interviews with Syrian entrepreneurs who established businesses after 2011, and three interviews with representatives from the Chambers of Commerce in Istanbul (the most significant metropolis in Turkey), Gaziantep (one of the fastest-growing local economies in South-eastern Turkey since 2011), and in Hatay (a small city bordering Syria).

## 2. Analytical Framework

Studies on Syrian refugee entrepreneurship follow the mainstream line in the pertinent literature and concentrate on personality factors (Obschonka & Hahn, 2018), personal motivations (Mawson & Kasem, 2019; Shneikat & Alrawadieh, 2019), and personal strategies (Bizri, 2017), also underlining legal and financial barriers. Kloosterman (2010) criticizes the mainstream literature's individualistic view and suggests concentrating on the interaction between the individual entrepreneur and his or her legal, social and economic environment—in other words, the opportunity structure. Founding a start-up requires money, know-how, relations with customers and partners, and a suitable locality to combine it all. Bourdieu's (1986, 2013) concept of forms of capital provides a robust basis for analysing interactions between entrepreneurs and their social environment. According to Bourdieu (1986), capital is accumulated labour—human energy spent in time, reified and accumulated as wealth, knowledge, social networks, institutions and prestige. In a topological understanding of society, diverse forms of capital are dimensions that define the place of every agent and his or her possibilities of action. The historical totality of accumulated forms of capital embodied as agency and social institutions constructs the 'field.'

Temporality and locality are necessary for such accumulation. Concerning international migration, the individual moves out of one field—namely, the original location—and enters a new one. The new field brings about changes in meaning and power—that is, in the possibilities of action provided by all forms of capital individually embodied in the agent. Moreover, when migration is irregular, as in the case of asylum seekers, the new set of relations in the typically undocumented field of the host country often shrinks these possibilities of action, bringing about uncertainty, precariousness, and ambiguity. Hence, the degree to which the opportunity structure can be leveraged or utilized differs from immigrant to immigrant.

Bourdieu's (1986, 2013) forms of capital offers a helpful framework to uncover group- and case-specific differences in how the opportunity structure is navigated. The analytical framework of forms of capital can be adapted in the case of Syrian entrepreneurs as follows. Their economic capital consists of money and things directly convertible to money. Their social capital includes connections that introduce new possibilities of access

to resources, consisting of strong ties (e.g., family) and weaker ties (e.g., friends and fellow countrymen). The third form is cultural capital, which for Syrians incorporates a range of dimensions, including institutionalized forms such as educational certificates and diplomas, and embodied forms like tastes, skills and dispositions (like entrepreneurial flair or experience). Crucially, this embodied form of cultural capital includes occupational skills, such as cooking or hairdressing, as well as communication skills, and know-how in the manufacturing of certain goods, such as shoemaking or machine moulding. It also covers aesthetic knowledge about the preferences of target groups, local citizens, or Syrians in Turkey and verbal skills such as knowledge of Arabic, Turkish, English, etc. Finally, a component of cultural capital is expertise in local knowledge—which is to say: formal knowledge about the laws and bureaucracy necessary for starting an enterprise in Turkey, and practical knowledge of agents in the local markets, retailers, wholesalers, etc. Symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2013) reflects the recognition and legitimation of the various other forms. It is good reputation, prestige, and respect that empowers access to networks and relations of recognition, opening possibilities to convert one type of capital to another. In this study, symbolic capital consists of prestige acquired in Syria and earned among the local community in Turkey. The significance of social capital in refugee entrepreneurship, as well as the difficulties arising from limited economic and cultural capital, are underlined in the literature (Katila & Wahlbeck, 2012; Wahlbeck, 2007).

In sum, forms of capital constitute an analytical framework to deepen our understanding of refugee entrepreneurs' possibilities of action. However, these possibilities are affected by the legal-political and social, linguistic and economic opportunities obtaining in the host country. The opportunity structure for Syrian entrepreneurs consists, as Kloosterman (2010) suggests, in the institutional framework at the macro-level, meaning the relevant legal and policy framework regulating investment and the rights of immigrants, the meso-level of time- or space-specific opportunities in the local economy, and the micro-level of the entrepreneur's resources. Immigrant entrepreneurship is thus agent-driven integration—namely, a proactive practice of revalidating and re-accumulating forms of capital and reclaiming and re-acquiring one's place in a new society.

The migrant entrepreneur—in leveraging the available opportunities and forms of capital—generates not only a new business enterprise but also new goods, relations, appearances, places for coming together, and intercultural communication between host and immigrant populations. Hence their experiences are interrelated with integration. In this study, analysis of Syrian small entrepreneurship focuses on integration in terms of relations with the state and the market, which are interrelated and interactive processes driven by macro- and meso-level structures as rules set by the state and market conditions, as well as micro-strategies—i.e., individ-

ual utilization of forms of capital. The following subsections provide an overview of factors, and how they all interact in the various realms of integration.

### 3. Setting the Context of Integration for Syrians in Turkey: Legal-Political and Economic Conditions as Macro- and Meso-Level Structures

This section provides information about the number of Syrians in Turkey and the three cities pertinent to the study, the relevant legal-political framework (i.e., the principal rules institutionally set in the realm of relations with the state), and details on the local market (i.e., the context of market relations and Syrians' meso-level opportunities).

From 2011, when the armed conflict in Syria began, through to March 2016, the Turkish government followed an open-door policy for those fleeing the conflict, accepting them as 'guests.' The refugee camps were soon overwhelmed by the sheer number of arrivals and Syrians began to settle throughout the country. By 2018, 94.2% of the 3.6 million Syrian refugees were living in urban areas, with only 5.8% remaining in camps (DGMM, 2019). The Law on Foreigners and International Protection granting Syrians temporary protection status provided the legal grounds for the Turkish government's 'guest' policy, and underscored the fact that settlement was expected to be temporary and the provisions of recognition of Syrians' stay arbitrary rather than rights-based. The formal registration of Syrians started only in 2013. Accession to the labour market was regulated in 2016 with the By-Law on Work Permits of Foreigners Under Temporary Protection, declaring that all immigrants except for those working in seasonal agriculture and stock farming would require a work permit. These are restricted according to residential areas and job sectors and are decided after evaluation of the work permit applications submitted by employers or workers. Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel (2017) criticize the legal framework forcing unpredictability and insecurity on Syrian refugees' lives and status. This article underlines the importance of macro-economic structure and informal economy in addition to the legal structure.

The four-year delay between the beginning of the open-door policy and the regulation of work permits opened a temporal phase in which informal jobs and business could grow. Turkey has an extensive informal economy which is the main site of employment for Syrians and for some Turkish nationals as well. The informal economy was estimated at 30% to 35% of Turkish GDP between 2010 and 2015 (Elgin & Sezgin, 2017). As the OECD (2008, p. 88) has noted: "Over 40% of the [Turkish] workforce is either working in informal salaried jobs or as own-account or unpaid family workers." Today, between 750,000 and 950,000 Syrians are working informally in Turkey, according to estimates (ICG, 2018).

Turkey's existing stock of unemployment made the open-door policy a challenge in terms of labour market

effects. As of 2019, Turkey's unemployment rate is 14.1% (4.5 million people; TÜİK, 2019), and the workforce potential of Syrian immigrants is 2,099,132 (DGMM, 2019). Between 2011 and 2017, 20,966 temporary work permits were issued to Syrians in Turkey (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services, 2019). Most of the jobs available are low-skilled, short-term, flexible and low-paid (Lordoğlu & Aslan, 2016). Syrians work with daily wages of 5.6 TL in Hatay, monthly salaries of 406 TL in Gaziantep, and 1,000 TL Turkey-wide as of 2015 (Kutlu, 2019). Wages differ according to gender and ethnicity. In 2015, in the largest employment sector in Istanbul—namely, clothing and textiles—Turkish male and female workers earned 1,494 TL and 1,221 TL, respectively, while Syrian male and female workers earned 1,155 TL and 776 TL, respectively; the minimum wage was 1,273 TL, which is below the estimated 'hunger line' of 1,385 TL and the poverty line of 4,512 TL (Mutlu et al., 2018). The conversion at that time was approximately 2.9 TL for every US\$1. A 2018 survey shows that Syrian workers typically earn 400 TL less than Turkish workers, who earn 1,880 TL on average (Uysal, Gursel, Anil, Uncu, & Bakis, 2018, p. 7). The general market conditions also affect immigrants' possibilities. For instance, Özar (2016) underlines that the small entrepreneurs are concentrated in urban areas, the bureaucracy negatively affects start-ups, and hence there is a tendency to slip into the informal market. Moreover, she notes that the male-dominated structure of the society is a severe barrier to women's entrepreneurship.

Given macro-level legal-political framework and complex labour market conditions, small business and self-employment becomes a survival strategy and plays a role in reducing unemployment among immigrants while also benefitting the host economy (see, e.g., Carree, Congregado, Golpe, & van Stel, 2015). As mentioned, the Turkish case is important, given its salience in shedding light on the effects of informality on immigrant entrepreneurship. In Turkey, the informal economy appears to have become the core site of economic integration for most and founding a start-up has become an attractive—albeit hard to achieve—option for Syrians with little capital, regardless whether they are registered or not.

Official statistics show the acceleration in the growth of firms with Syrian capital starting from 2010. Between 2010 and 2012, 238 new firms with Syrian capital were established, increasing to 6,311 between 2013 and 2017 (Güven, Kenanoğlu, Kadkoy, & Kurt, 2018). According to the Building Markets report, over 7,200 companies had been formally established by Syrians in Turkey by the end of May 2018. Most of the big firms are in Istanbul. The number of firms with Syrian capital registered at the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce grew from 95 in 2012 to 3,129 in 2018, with 10% having more than 500,000 TL (\$94,470) in start-up capital. Unregistered small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are estimated to be three times this number (Palacioğlu, 2019). Building Markets (2018) estimates that 2% of Syrian SMEs are medium-

sized, employing 20 to 250 people and the majority consists of micro-enterprises with Istanbul and Gaziantep being the leading locations. Syrian entrepreneurs in Turkey, therefore, fall into two categories. The first are big investors—namely, opportunity-seeking migrants who choose Istanbul not only due to refugee reasons but also for the profit opportunities that obtain there. Second are SMEs that reflect the classical approach of refugee entrepreneurship, which is driven by survival attributes and necessity (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008) rather than maximizing profits in new locations (Bizri, 2017). This article focuses on this latter category of small entrepreneurs.

The density of local communities, economies, and integration policies set the meso-level opportunities for Syrian entrepreneurs. Local community density is essential since most of the immigrant entrepreneurs provide culture-specific goods and services. The greater share of Syrians is registered in Istanbul (546,296), followed by Gaziantep (437,844) and Hatay (427,500). They amount to 3.63% of the city population of Istanbul, 21.6% in Gaziantep, and 26.5% in Hatay (DGMM, 2019). Gaziantep and Hatay certainly have excellent market conditions for Syrian entrepreneurs, with their large immigrant populations. However, Istanbul—as the commercial centre of Turkey and home to 15 million residents—offers a large and vibrant market that serves over half a million Syrians, in addition to other Arabic-speaking tourists who demand a large variety of products. Despite the large Syrian population, no city-level integration policy has been implemented in Istanbul, although the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce has a specialist providing counselling for Syrian entrepreneurs. Some NGOs also run support initiatives. Nevertheless, it appears that no formal means to serve the potential immigrant and tourist market in Istanbul has yet been established. As observed by Uysal et al. (2018, p. 50), most of the Syrian entrepreneurs aim to cater to Syrian customers and have opened small shops—market stalls, restaurants, butcher shops, and bakeries—in neighbourhoods where the Syrian population concentrates.

Gaziantep and Hatay have denser Syrian populations concentrated in certain districts (Gültekin, 2018; Harunoğulları & Cengiz, 2014) as well as local integration efforts. Their difference lies in the scale of economic opportunities. Turkey and Syria have long-standing historical and cultural relations intertwined with mixed marriages and cross-border trade partnerships, especially between Aleppo, on the Syrian side, and Gaziantep and Hatay on the Turkish side. Gaziantep was a famous trade city on the Silk Road, and still has a robust private sector and formal and informal cross-cultural, regional and international trade networks. Mutual economic relations have shifted, becoming more visible on Turkish territory after the mass refugee influx began in 2011. The Gaziantep municipality has supported and eased procedures for Syrians' opening manufacturing businesses in the locality—namely, in the organized industry district called GATEM. During the field research, Syrian en-

trepreneurs were visible in the manufacturing, textile, catering and service sectors, as well as in trading.

Hatay provides a culturally welcoming context, with its established Arabic-speaking minority. Since 2015, projects have been carried out in cooperation with the United Nations, and local branches of Turkey's labour agency that support Syrian entrepreneurship and labour force participation. However, the economic scale of the city is relatively small, as is the available seed capital. Özkul and Dengiz's (2018) survey shows that marital status, professional and business experience, monthly income and years spent in Hatay are critical factors in Syrian entrepreneurship in the area. In this location, the majority of enterprises are in the range of 10,000 to 20,000 TL in start-up capital, employ between one and two people and provide goods mostly to the settled Syrian population.

#### 4. Methodology and Field Research

Empirical data for this qualitative study came from field observations and 24 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Syrian small entrepreneurs conducted at their workplaces in three cities—namely Istanbul, Gaziantep, and Hatay, in 2018–2019. Eight interviews were conducted in each city. Interviewees were reached by directly approaching the shops in the districts populated by immigrants and tourists. Criteria for interviewees were to be Syrian entrepreneurs who had started in Turkey after 2011 and willingness to participate in the research. The author and two research assistants fluent in Arabic carried out the interviews. Additionally, the respective city Chambers of Commerce were visited in all three locations in order to gather information about their activities and reports on local Syrian entrepreneurs. The Hacettepe University Ethics Committee gave ethical approval to the study.

Interviewees were grocers, barbers, hairdressers, tailors, cell-phone sellers, owners of restaurants, shoe and textile shops, as well as a kindergarten owner, manufacturers and wholesalers, aged 25 to 50. Five of them were university graduates and the others had between eight and nine years of formal education. Interviewees had urban backgrounds; three were from Latakia and two from Al-Hasakah, with all the others from Aleppo. They had been in Turkey for four to six years. Semi-structured interview questions were organized around themes of migration and entrepreneurship stories. The interview transcripts were repeatedly reviewed and the narratives analysed according to common turning points, foci, and diversities, and were coded and then thematized according to the conceptual framework as well as insights that arose from the specific narratives.

#### 5. Findings

The findings are organized under four themes: (1) creating mobility and choosing localities; (2) coping with

downward social mobility; (3) starting-up; and (4) sustaining the business. The discussion details, for each theme, how (i.e., by which strategies) interviewees utilized their various forms of capital.

### 5.1. *Creating Mobility and Choosing Localities*

Social capital facilitates both the spread and the concentration of migration (Faist, 2000). In the case of Syrian immigrants in Turkey, it accounts for their spread across cities as well as their concentration in certain districts. Kinship relations and the social-economic qualities of the cities were essential criteria for interviewees. In all three cities, interviewees were aware of solidarity among networks, used their connections to choose the destination, and settled near their connections:

We had to flee from Syria. We came here directly because we have relatives living here. [Before the war] we used to visit one another regularly. We are related to 30 families here in Gazikent. Some of them have Turkish citizenship. (A5, male, 40, machine moulder)

Long-standing kinship relations thus made Gaziantep and Hatay first destinations. This holds with results of field studies in Gaziantep where 79% of participants declared having kinship relations in the area (Gültekin, 2018). Besides kinship relations, interviewees know Hatay as a border city and perceive it as culturally close to Syria:

I choose Hatay because there are lots of Turkmen people here. When I walk in the streets of Hatay, I feel as if I was in Lazkiye [his hometown]. People in Hatay speak Arabic. The people and culture are very much alike. I like to hear the Alevi accent. (H4, male, döner buffet owner)

Istanbul was the second settlement for all the interviewees. It was chosen for its economic opportunities. Interviewees used weaker ties, such as friends of friends, for finding jobs and lodging, which enabled their mobility. They first settled in other small cities, passed some time, gained knowledge and found new connections (or revitalized old ones) before making their way to Istanbul.

### 5.2. *Coping with Downward Social Mobility: Depreciation and Re-Accumulation of Forms of Capital*

As social capital is highly local (Faist, 2000), within the context of international migration, the value of institutionalized cultural capital may weaken or diminish in the host country. For example, fleeing migrants are not necessarily able to bring all the pertinent documentation with them. Convertibility to economic capital can also be undermined if the host country will not recognize diplomas or due to labour market restrictions on specific sectors, such as health and law. Uysal et al. (2018, p. 7) note

that “one in five unemployed Syrians say that they cannot provide the necessary documents such as diplomas. One in five unemployed Syrians say that their relevant skills are not recognized.” Eight of the interviewees were university graduates but none could work in their profession. Interviewee I3 was a male nurse in Syria; however, his diplomas were not valid in Turkey, and he eventually set up as a middleman:

I was a nurse in Syria. I had a good home and a good salary. I also had my trade. I came here and became a worker. I lost everything. I was affected by this change. It was very hard for me. I went to a psychologist, then in time I met new people and made new connections. Slowly, I started to do some small trades. Now I have a lot of social connections; I am a known person. I am a flexible trader, collecting orders and selling things made by Syrians here, such as dresses and buckles. (I3, male, middleman)

Regardless of the level of education, all interviewees talked about losing their social status during the migratory process. They lost their jobs and left behind some of their economic capital (shops, real estate) as well as most of their social connections, trade partners, colleagues and kinship ties. This is a concrete example of devaluation of an agent’s stock of various forms of capital in the process of irregular migration, as discussed in the following sections.

Our life was wonderful in Syria. I was trading in Antep pistachios and household and kitchen appliances. We had to leave everything behind and flee when the war started. I was unemployed for a time, and then I worked several daily jobs. It was hard. In time I found a Syrian partner, and we opened this shop. Now we are buying second-hand kitchen appliances to repair and then re-sell them. 95% of our customers are Syrians; only poor Turks come to our shop (H7, male, craftsman).

Interviewees followed similar strategies for coping with downward social mobility. First, they admitted the situation, passed the emotional stage of dealing with feelings of loss, and worked various jobs to survive. They got to know new people, used the solidarity among kin and co-ethnics—in short, they reacquired social capital—and founded start-up businesses.

### 5.3. *Starting-Up*

#### 5.3.1. *Finding the Money for Investment*

People with established economic capital in Syria were able to move some of it to Turkey. Others who did not possess enough economic capital for a start-up in Turkey worked and saved money and pooled resources and loans in the family for investment:

My family and friends supported me. Without their support, I could not even buy myself a wheelbarrow. (H2, male, shoe shop owner)

This finding aligns with studies pointing out the importance of social networks among Syrian refugees (e.g., Refai et al., 2018; Shneikat & Alrawadieh, 2019). In the case of Gaziantep, the survey carried out by Gültekin (2018) shows the strength of solidarity relations in the immigrant community, as 54% of participants declared that they could ask for a loan from kin and 34% from friends.

### 5.3.2. Finding the Idea

As mentioned above, although the institutionalized cultural capital lost its convertibility within Syrian-Turkish migration, Syrian entrepreneurs nevertheless utilize embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) in four forms to find the idea for a new enterprise:

#### 1. Entrepreneurship experience:

We were in food commerce in Damascus. I know how to do it. So, I took over this grocery here. (I8, male, grocer)

#### 2. Knowledge of occupations (such as tailor or shoemaker):

Shoemaking is the craft of Turkmens in Syria. We have been craftsmen for generations. It is our family business. So, I did what I know and opened this shoe factory. (A1, male, shoe atelier)

#### 3. Manufacture know-how:

I was doing the same business in Aleppo, running a printing house and a carton packaging factory. It is a family tradition to work this way, starting with my grandfather. So, I started the same kind of business here. (A2, male, packaging manufacturer)

#### 4. Cultural knowledge such as understanding group-specific aesthetic preferences and tastes (especially in restaurants and with barbers) and language:

Syrian friends prefer [doing business with] us. Because we speak the same language, they can express themselves here, and I understand what they want. (I6, male, barber)

Twenty-one of the interviewees were also entrepreneurs before the war, so they sought to continue their business in the new setting. Craftsmen utilized their professional skills for starting-up businesses. Know-how in the manufacturing of certain goods, such as shoemak-

ing and machine moulding, was also utilized. Knowledge of aesthetic and group-specific preferences and tastes is vital for seizing market opportunities, utilized in the food and textile service sectors by restaurants, buffets, barbers, tailors, etc. It also enables them to meet the immigrant population's consumer demand. Embodied cultural capital affects ideas about what to do and how to do it, thus explaining the sectoral concentration of Syrian small entrepreneurs. When institutional cultural capital is lost when official recognition in the new setting is not forthcoming, embodied cultural capital becomes a survival asset. Profitability depends on unofficial/community-level recognition and demand for the produced goods and services.

### 5.3.3. Meeting Consumer Demand: Utilizing Cultural, Social and Symbolic Capital

Cultural, social and symbolic forms of capital are utilized to meet consumer demand in local immigrant hubs—namely, catering, hairdressing, and the grocery business. Entrepreneurs developed four strategies for re-acquiring social capital, depending on the particular production sector. The first strategy is to start where they are—dense immigrant districts—and to leverage shared symbolic (Arabic language) and cultural capital (knowledge of tastes):

There was no one around selling groceries. So, I decided to open a grocery shop. People here need Syrian goods. (H3, male, grocer)

The second strategy, primarily used by manufacturers, is leveraging pre-migratory social capital—that is, the network of old customers—to found start-ups and promote transnational trade relations:

I have 15 years of experience in graphic design. When I was in Syria, I had customers from Bahrain to Qatar. I did not cut my ties with them after I came here. I am still working for them. I know what they like. After three years in Turkey, I still have no Turkish customers. I work for customers in 15 countries. Today, for example, I made a design for a restaurant in Germany. (A8, male, graphic designer)

The third strategy is to leverage symbolic capital—drawing on the reputation earned in Syria, such as old and known firm names—when opening a new business in Turkey.

We had a school in Aleppo. I used the same name [her family name] for this new kindergarten [in Turkey]. It was quite well-known in Aleppo. And yes, [the name recognition] was very useful. When people see it, they trust us and send their children to us. In the education sector, trust is a must. (A4, female, kindergarten owner)



The fourth strategy—used by middlemen, wholesalers and traders—is to connect Syrian producers and customers in various localities. There are trade chains—a manufacturer in Gaziantep produces, say, canned Syrian food, which wholesale traders then transport to Istanbul’s Rami passage in the Fatih district, and grocers buy from there and on-sell to Syrians in various districts of Istanbul:

Here I sell Syrian food: salami, cheese, spices. Syrians come and buy from me. There is a factory in Antep that produces Syrian food in Turkey. I source from there. There is a wholesaler’s bazaar in Fatih, called Rami. Everyone knows it. I buy products from there also. (I7, male, grocer)

Some interviewees were able to reconnect to their old customer networks; others established new relations with immigrant communities; others still market to local citizens. All of this adds up to a re-accumulation of social capital via cultural and symbolic capital.

#### 5.3.4. Re-Accumulating Social and Cultural Capital to Reclaim One’s Place

Re-accumulating social capital and revalidating the cultural capital necessary for a start-up requires time, especially when people have relatively little economic capital. The first strategy is to work for other people in the sector, make connections and learn ways of doing business in their localities and then open shops. Two women hairdressers and three barbers interviewed first worked at other hairdressers and then, after gaining some experience, started their own shops:

I know entrepreneurship. I wanted to continue what I know. But in the beginning, I had difficulties. I did not know where to buy the products. In Syria, no matter where you go, the same things have the same price. But it is not like that in Turkey. I had difficulties in finding where to buy quality products at reasonable prices. I asked around. Turkish friends helped me a lot in this. They directed me to people in Istanbul instead of Antep. (H5, shoe and clothing retailer)

The second strategy is to build a dialogue with Turkish colleagues. Re-acquiring social capital is crucial for developing knowledge about how the local market works, about where to acquire the needed goods. Turkish friends are useful for acquiring knowledge about opening businesses and legal regulations:

Both Turks and Syrians were helpful. I am a stranger and lacked the necessary information to trade in Turkey. I learned this from new contacts. Turkish friends informed and helped me with the legal procedures to open a business. (A1, male, shoe atelier)

The third strategy—a quick way to achieve legal knowledge—is to attend training programs or projects NGOs run on developing local entrepreneurship:

The Danish Refugee Council has opened an entrepreneurship course here. They teach us everything we need in four months—all the details, legal requirements, and how to meet them. Licensing, social security...[and] what to do if someone cheats you, etc. It was beneficial. They gave us money and food during the course. (H2, male, shoe retailer)

The initial strategies of starting as an employee and investing in social capital by making Turkish friends and gaining knowledge about local markets are individual strategies and require time. However, the third strategy—gaining knowledge and sometimes seed capital via attending projects—depends on meso-level relations, the actions of local government, and civil society. This strategy requires less time and suggests that local integration projects have the potential to hasten start-up formation and the formalization of immigrant entrepreneurship, thus supporting integration. Whether the enterprise is formal or informal affects its sustainability, as well as the owner’s integration.

#### 5.4. Sustaining the Business: Strategies and Challenges

The type and sector of entrepreneurship and the strategies for sustainability depend not only on an agent’s ability to utilize forms of capital but also on the strategies of other agents and the social milieu. Rival entrepreneurs are also agents with tactics and strategies; hence, there are counter-strategies for sustainability in the market. The local economy is a game field full of trade relations and trust as well as cheating and injustice. Being in the informal sector makes this field more complicated and riskier, offering advantages as well as competition. The first strategy is to remain secluded, accept informality and keep prices low:

The first challenge is choosing a place for business. It should not be near a Turkish shop. For example, there are many Syrians in our neighbourhood; hence, you should open a shop that appeals to Syrians not one that Turks are running or that appeals to the Turks. Second, especially now, if you want to start up, in order to avoid problems, you should register and get a licence....Now I’ve been running this place for four years. I have had no problems because I’m a bit far from the centre, far from the region of the Turks. This is important because, for example, they [Turks] cannot compete with us on price, and they have to register and pay tax. For example, I sell a phone-charger for 30 TL which they cannot sell below 50 TL. We don’t have tax. So, stay clear of business near the Turks. (H1, cell-phone seller)

Being in the informal market relieves entrepreneurs from paying tax and the costs of social security and helps retailers keep prices low, which results in price differences between formal and informal markets and hence paves the way for negative attitudes and envy between local and immigrant entrepreneurs:

Now for the traders, they are jealous when we open. I'm selling cheaper; customers love me. For example, I have two Turkish friends; they cooperate. I also want to buy and sell Turkish goods, but nobody sells them to me. I want to sell Turkish cheese and sausage, yoghurt, eggs, and chips but the wholesalers don't sell to me. I can only sell Syrian goods. For two years, I've been trying to buy a locker to sell ice-cream, but nobody will sell me one. I can't get over it. I have no solution. I don't want to have enemies around, so I have to shut up. For example, in the grocery store next door, there are both vegetables and fruits, and ice-cream. I have money, I could get into this business, but I do not want to attract hostility, so I steer clear [of this market]. (I2, male, grocer)

Here, the strategy for sustainability in the face of exclusion tactics is not to expand the business but to keep it small, which decreases employment and integration potential. Syrian entrepreneurs generally work with Syrian workers, as a typical example of refugee entrepreneurship (Bizri, 2017) and ethnic economies (Katila & Wahlbeck, 2012). The immigrant co-ethnic population provides a hub of workers who know the work, are easy to communicate with and are docile. In Istanbul and Hatay, all the interviewees were either self-employed or employers of two to three people and unregistered. Working conditions in the sector are hard. All seven self-employed were working on average 12 hours per day. However, working conditions improve as the size of the enterprise grows, as observed in Gaziantep. Gaziantep's strategy to support manufacturers helps Syrian entrepreneurs become stronger and provide more employment as the business grows; they tend to pay social security at least for some long-standing and essential employees:

I have fifty, sixty workers. Eight to ten of them are Turkish, and the rest are Syrians. We have two shifts; they work eight hours each. They work for minimum wage. But master shoemakers sometimes earn up to 4,000 TL a month....My accountant takes care of this. I have ten insured workers. I pay the insurance for those who have been working with me for a long time and are most useful. (A2, male, shoe atelier)

Meso-level opportunity structures (Kloosterman, 2010) and local governmental integration policies may help entrepreneurs to formalize and grow their businesses, and provide jobs both for immigrants and locals, which paves the way for economic and social integration.

## 6. Discussion: Utilization of Immigrant Capital and Integration

To recap, the concept of social capital proves useful in understanding refugee entrepreneurship. Bourdieu's (1986) concept of forms of capital—economic, social, cultural and symbolic—thus form the base of the analysis, as well as Kloosterman's (2010) formulation of opportunity structure. Findings show that in addition to connecting entrepreneurs and co-ethnic labour (Bizri, 2017; Katila & Wahlbeck, 2012), social capital also explains the scattering of Syrians and their small business in Turkey. Cultural capital, especially in its embodied form, explains the sectoral concentration of Syrian small entrepreneurs.

Further, the study indicates that restrictions on the convertibility of institutionalized cultural capital via restrictions of the validity of diplomas and labour force participation or language barriers compose a macro-level structure diminishing the value of refugees' capital, restricting their agency, and disadvantaging them in the market. Some refugees partly surmount this situation via utilizing their embodied cultural capital, such as entrepreneurial experience, know-how of a certain production method, as well as knowledge of Syrian culture and Arabic. The profitability of this strategy depends on the local meso-level opportunity structure, especially the existence of co-ethnic groups and cultural similarities with the host country. Hence, Gaziantep and Hatay have witnessed a growing number of Syrian enterprises, both formal and informal, despite the fact that their economies are smaller than cities like Ankara, Izmir or Antalya. Utilization of embodied cultural capital also explains why most Syrian entrepreneurs start up in co-ethnic districts and sell culturally specific products, as noted by Uysal et al. (2018) and Harunoğulları and Cengiz (2014).

Beyond focusing on personal motivations (Mawson & Kasem, 2019; Obschonka & Hahn, 2018), analysing the utilization of forms of capital helps us to think about individual entrepreneurs in relation to their social environment and to the accumulation of relations of labour in time, concerning their personal positions within the old and new social and economic contexts. Forms of capital can be converted, depending on the situation (Bourdieu, 1986). The findings show that the vitality of transferring, re-acquiring and converting capitals changes according to the interviewees' type of business. First, for the producers of direct goods and services, such as restaurants and barbers, re-acquiring social capital through establishing relations with local people and the immigrant community allowed local demand to be met. They mainly utilize their knowledge of aesthetic preferences. For finding seed capital, most of them worked in other jobs and utilized resources and loans from family and kin. Second, for the producers of intermediate goods, such as carton packaging or the machine moulding business, re-acquiring social capital in the new location among trade networks and utilizing social capital for trustworthy relations with other business people was important; exper-

tise of local knowledge was crucial, and transfer of know-how was not a problem. Third, for the traders—such as retailers, grocery owners and middlemen connecting producers—re-acquiring social capital both to reach daily customers and wholesale networks and leveraging symbolic capital, such as respect and trust within the small business environment, were the main strategies. Studies on refugee entrepreneurship generally concentrate on single case studies (Bizri, 2017) or entrepreneurs in one sector like catering (Wahlbeck, 2007) or hospitality (Shneikat & Alrawadieh, 2019). This finding indicates that cross-sector comparative studies are one avenue for future research.

This study also shows that a host country with a wide informal sector not only channels immigrant labour to informal jobs but also expands the chances of informal start-ups (Özar, 2016). An original finding is that being in the informal sector affects refugee entrepreneurs' strategies for sustaining the business, bringing about distortions and unpredictability in integration, a relatively under-researched topic in the literature.

## **7. Conclusion: Refugee Entrepreneurship and Integration in the Shadow of the Informal Economy**

Immigrant entrepreneurship has been on the scholarly agenda for a long time (Borjas, 1986), whereas refugee entrepreneurship studies are relatively new. Studies (Meister & Mauer, 2019; Shneikat & Alrawadieh, 2019) underline that as refugees start and manage their own businesses, they simultaneously become embedded in the host economy and society. Refugee entrepreneurship has been suggested as a tool for integration (Bizri, 2017; Refai et al., 2018; Shneikat & Alrawadieh, 2019). The discussion on integration has focused largely on economic integration, participation in the labour force and language proficiency. The integration literature is generally concentrated on European countries where informal economic relations are relatively scarce compared to the Middle Eastern economies. The Turkish example—with its comparatively wide informal economy embracing both nationals and immigrants—is a salient case to introduce the impact of the informal economy into the integration discussion. In this article, integration was conceptualized in this study as an interaction between macro- and meso-level structures and the micro-strategies of agents.

The findings of this study have implications for the two realms of integration—namely, relations with the state and with the market. Syrian entrepreneurship is highly affected by its relations with the state—registration and settlement policy as well as labour market regulations. Late registration and the existing migration governance strategy of prohibitions without control, the lack of effective oversight of commercial workshops despite regulations, strict, top-down settlement policy, and restrictions on mobility all open up a new grey zone for informal economic relations for irregular migrants.

The slippery ground of the informal economy limits the agency of Syrians under temporary protection in their relations with the state. While the informal economy eases setting up a new shop (no bureaucracy, just verbal contracts) it also implies: (1) no legal grounds for defending oneself in the market; (2) not being entirely accepted by the trade; and (3) defensive strategies that keep the enterprises small.

Refugee entrepreneurship is seen as a tool for enhancing economic and social integration. But in the Turkish case, one needs to underline the differentiation between formal and informal immigrant entrepreneurs. Hence relations with the state and the market are interconnected realms of integration. Informal entrepreneurship does not seem effective in enhancing integration in terms of relations with the state. It provides informal jobs and some money for the daily survival of immigrant workers. Such businesses tend to remain small, hence having a limited effect on economic and social integration.

Being in the informal sector keeps the business small and also reinforces concentration in immigrant districts, in addition to the initial effects of social capital that concentrates immigrant settlement in certain localities. It limits entrepreneurship's effects on the relations between Syrians and Turkish people in two ways. First, it limits production and trade by Syrian entrepreneurs that could create an atmosphere of exchange between the two cultures. Second, and relatedly, it limits the potential acts of exchange, dialogue, and daily encounters—in short, relations with the host community. The insecurities arising from informality lead to precariousness in connecting with the host community, and thus isolation. None of the interviewees in the present study reported connections with civil society organizations, which are generally understood to be social aid providers.

Despite these limitations, small Syrian entrepreneurship is undoubtedly a tool for survival that has the potential for further development. Some entrepreneurs even have international trade relations, which harbours the potential for enhancing transnational relations. Differences in cities' meso-level opportunity structures indicate that local integration policies provide an opportunity to formalize existing small enterprises, which may open new channels for integration as well as increasing production and employment.

## **Conflict of Interests**

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

## **Transnational Practices and Migrant Capital: The Case of Filipino Women in Iceland**

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### **Abstract**

Filipinos have been moving to Iceland in increasing numbers since the 1990s, primarily for employment opportunities and to reunite with relatives. They are the third largest group of immigrants in Iceland and the largest group from Asia. The majority of them work in low-income jobs in the service and production sectors where they do not utilize their education. Many arrived with the help of relatives already living in Iceland. Based on multi-sited ethnographic research, this article examines the diverse mobilization of migrant capital in Iceland and in the Philippines. The analysis draws on Bourdieu's concepts of capital and transnational theories to highlight how Filipinos draw on formal and informal resources in Iceland and their transnational social field in mobilizing their capital. Their extended kin groups in Iceland and networks back in the Philippines are important in building migrant capital in Iceland and in the Philippines. The study shows that this mobilization is not only affected by structural factors in Iceland, such as racialization, but also by economic position and cultural capital in the Philippines.

### **Keywords**

Bourdieu; Filipinos; Iceland; migrant capital; social capital; transnationalism

### **Issue**

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### **1. Introduction**

Filipinos are the third largest migrant group in Iceland and the largest from Asia. The group consists of twice as many women as men. This migration began in the early 1990s, with a small number of women arriving to be with their Icelandic spouses. Employment has been an important motivation for the continued migration of people from the Philippines to Iceland. An important goal for most of them is to improve their and their children's lives, as well as to help provide for family members living in the Philippines. Despite their high levels of education, Filipinos, for the most part, work in low-income jobs, and they can only apply their education or cultural capital to a limited extent. In Iceland, Filipino women are often portrayed, along with other Asian women, as a vulnerable group and as potential victims of marriage migration (Skaptadóttir, 2015). Their differences and agency in

mobilizing capital for their own projects is often made invisible in this discourse.

The vulnerable position of migrants in the labour market and in society in general is often discussed in relation to the loss of social and cultural capital that they experience when moving to another country. At the same time, researchers have increasingly focused on migrants' social networks and how they mobilize their capitals in new social and economic contexts. Research on transnationalism has shed light on how migrants continue to maintain important links to their countries of origin and on how these connections affect their experiences and opportunities in the host countries. Bourdieu's conception of social, economic and cultural capital is a useful tool to examine how migrants are both agents in their migration trajectories and affected by larger social structures that limit their possibilities (Kelly & Lusia, 2006).

This article explores Filipino women's experiences and positions in relation to their migration to Iceland. It draws on Bourdieu's concepts of social and cultural capital, on the one hand, and on a transnational perspective to highlight their different migration trajectories, on the other. Bourdieu's approach to social capital sheds light on individual agency and networks when people mobilize their resources to build capital. In addition, his theories can also serve as a tool to understand the maintenance of inequality and how structural relations may affect an individual's possibilities to change position (Bourdieu, 1986). Based on a study that applied ethnographic methods over a longer time in both Iceland and in the Philippines, the article examines how local and transnational social networks are, in many instances, imperative in shaping migrant capital. Focusing only on their lives in Iceland would only portray one side of the picture.

Describing the migration trajectories of five individual women, the article examines Filipino women's divergent positions in relation to their ability to accumulate or mobilize resources to increase their economic, social and cultural capital locally and in a transnational context. To shed light on these processes, it is essential to consider the motivations of different individuals and the societal contexts in which they act. The article explores how the women apply various resources, such as their education or networks in Iceland, to improve their positions. It also depicts how remittances and maintaining transnational relations play a role in the construction of migrants' capital and how people sometimes improve their position and class status in their countries of origin. Transnational practices and utilization of migrant capital additionally take place in the context of a Filipino national political economy and ideology that encourages people to leave in order to care for those left behind (Barber, 2008, 2010). The context of racialization and class position in Iceland when building of capital must also be accounted for (Loftsdóttir, 2017).

The article shows the importance of combining these different aspects when analysing migrant capital. The article begins with a discussion of migrant capital and of how Bourdieu's theories of social capital are useful in increasing the understanding of the processes of capital building in the host society. The analysis of migrant capital also implies adding a transnational perspective to highlight how migrants' positions in and continued ties with the sending society may affect their ability to build capital. After a brief description of the study, the results are presented beginning with a short background on Filipinos in Iceland. Then, the different migration trajectories of the five women chosen for this analysis are examined.

## 2. Social Capital and Transnational Relations

Many scholars have examined the social networks of migrant populations and applied diverse theories of social

capital when examining the experiences and positions of migrants. Recently, they have increasingly studied migrant capital, or how and to what extent migrants utilize resources available to them to maintain and create their capital through transnational and local networks (Erel, 2010, 2015; Paul, 2013; Ryan, Erel, & D'Angelo, 2015). According to Bourdieu, people's positions in society are determined by the volume of their social, cultural and economic capital. Bourdieu wrote most extensively about cultural capital, which refers to status in society that correlates with an individual's competences acquired when growing up. These can, for example, be reflected in taste or the way people speak or institutionalized in educational degrees (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Economic capital indicates economic possessions. Social capital refers to the ability to activate social networks to build and reinforce economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). All three kinds of capital are interconnected, so that persons born into a particular social field can increase their capital, for example, by converting economic capital into cultural capital by investing in education or art (Bourdieu, 1986). Differing amounts of cultural, economic and social capital reveal inequalities in society and how they are maintained, as reflected in Bourdieu's conceptions of social class and distinction (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

International migration is motivated by many factors. Working abroad in order to improve economic position is an important one, although it is often combined with other motivations (Paul, 2015). Migration research has highlighted how labour migrants draw on their local and transnational networks to find work abroad (Alberti, 2014). Many contemporary migrants are stuck in low-income and low-status temporary jobs (Anderson, 2010; Standing, 2011). They are commonly in specific niches of the labour market, independent of their former work experience and education (McDowell, 2008; Schrover, der Leun, & Quispel, 2007). Migrants often have difficulties in transferring their cultural capital when moving to a new country (Erel & Ryan, 2019). Paying attention to the everyday practises and individual strategies of migrants when improving their positions is important but should not lead to disregarding structural factors that limit their choices (Alberti, 2014). Different possibilities for travel and mobilizing their resources reflect the contemporary world of global inequalities registered in the flows of capital and people within the global political economy, where certain regions have become migrant-sending and others migrant-receiving (Barber, 2008; Mahler & Pessar, 2006). Racialization and practises of discrimination are commonly limiting factors in the mobilization of cultural capital for migrants (Erel & Ryan, 2019).

Despite losses through the migration process, people often attempt to confirm their capitals and generate new ones, for example, by engaging in migrant networks. Such networks can be valuable for migrants in order to access jobs, housing and information. As pointed out by Erel and Ryan (2019), migrants do not simply begin

to accumulate cultural, social and economic resources, since gains, losses and reorientations of capitals are connected across different social fields and the wider context of the society of residence. Moreover, migrant networks are not homogenous, and they may reflect hierarchical social positions where gender, class and other positions intersect. It cannot, therefore, be assumed that a migrant will necessarily be able to seek help or support from ethnic networks (Anthias, 2007; Erel, 2010).

Studies applying transnational perspectives have depicted how migrants continue to participate in the daily life of their countries of origin through the internet or travel when moving to another country and how they are embedded in multi-layered transnational social fields. Their identities and positions continue to be formed by participation in two nation states (Glick Schiller, 2010; Vertovec, 2006). The ability to care for those left behind, be it children, parents or others, is often an important reason for working abroad. Sending remittances can, in addition, boost people's social status in the country of origin. Remittances, either in cash or in kind, are not only between individuals or close family but can also take a collective form, raised by a group of people to support a particular group or community in the country of origin (Rahman & Lian, 2012).

Much has been written about the various aspects of Filipino migration, both about transnational relations and social networks, for example, on such themes as the global care chain and left-behind children and of migration of nurses and other health-sector workers. These studies have provided insight into the importance of the remittances and transnational family lives of many Filipinos (Madianou & Miller, 2012; Mahler & Pessar, 2006; Parreñas, 2005; Spitzer, Neufeld, Harrison, Hughes, & Stewart, 2003). Kelly and Lusi (2006) have shown that, among the Filipinos in Toronto, social capital is commonly an asset they bring with them from the Philippines. Conceptions of responsibilities and expressions of love and care are all important in transnational family ties and are often important motivations for sending remittances (Parreñas, 2005). The remittances sent to family must also be considered in the context of the limited welfare services in the Philippines (Barber, 2008). Since the 1970s, the government of the Philippines has emphasized the outmigration of workers as an economic strategy for gaining remittances from those working abroad. The government has encouraged emigration and the portrayal of Filipinos as good and loyal workers who can adjust to new cultures easily (Barber, 2008; Paul, 2015).

### 3. The Study

The discussion in this article is based on a longitudinal, multi-sited ethnographic study among Filipinos living in Iceland beginning in 2009. As an ethnographic study, participant observations and informal conversations on various occasions were important during the data collection. During this extended period, I conducted semi-

structured interviews with 65 persons, some repeatedly, and three focus groups and recorded numerous participant observations and informal conversations at various large and small events. The interviews were conducted in English or Icelandic, except for a few that were partly conducted in Cebuano or Tagalog and translated to English.

The study took place in Reykjavík, the capital of Iceland, in the surrounding municipalities and in three small towns in other parts of Iceland. It also included a research trip in 2011 and another in 2014 to the Philippines for about six weeks each, with participant observations and interviews taking place primarily in the Visayan area, but also in Manila. In the Philippines, I stayed with participants' families and travelled with Filipino women who assisted me in the research. The first 30 participants were selected based on their age, gender and how long they had been living in Iceland, using a list provided by Statistics Iceland. After the initial stage, participants were recruited using the snowball method. In the Philippines, interviews and informal conversations were conducted mostly with the family members and friends of the participants in Iceland. Others were taken with nursing students about their ideas on emigration.

More women than men participated in this research, and women were more willing than men to be interviewed. In this article, I focus on five women's stories to highlight the different ways in which they mobilize their capital. They do not reflect the diverse experiences of all Filipinos in Iceland but were chosen as their stories depict differences in their positions and abilities to mobilize resources to build capital. These women have all been in Iceland for 10 years or more and all speak Icelandic. The names are pseudonyms, and I have attempted to hide their identities in other ways. As one of them may still be recognized, the description of her story was written while consulting with her.

### 4. Filipinos in Iceland: The Women's Stories

The migration of Filipinos to Iceland began in the late 1980s and early 1990s with women arriving due to marriage with Icelandic spouses. They have since been one of the largest migrant groups in Iceland and are currently the third largest group of immigrants after Poles and Lithuanians. Women from the Philippines have always been more numerous than men, and in January of 2018, there were 1,245 women and 633 men born in the Philippines living in Iceland, a country of 348,450 inhabitants (Statistics Iceland, n.d.). The primary reasons almost all participants gave for their migration to Iceland was to improve their economic situation and to provide for their families back in the Philippines. Being with a family or spouse in Iceland was also commonly mentioned. The majority of the participants had tertiary education before arriving, and some chose their education with working abroad in mind. Secondary and tertiary education is generally conducted in English in the Philippines, and thus, most of the women spoke good

English upon arriving in Iceland. A small minority have been able to use their education, such as nursing, but the majority work in low-income, low-skilled jobs in various food production and service sectors, mostly with other immigrants (Júlíusdóttir, Skaptadóttir, & Karlsdóttir, 2013; Skaptadóttir, 2015; Yíngst & Skaptadóttir, 2018).

Although many have improved their economic situations, many participants also talk about not being respected or not getting promotions at work. Because of this, they express a loss of cultural capital and social status. This is in accordance with Kristjánsdóttir and Christiansen's (2019) study, which showed that Filipinos in Iceland, who work as specialists, commonly experience prejudice in their workplaces. They are affected by the racialization of Asian women in Iceland (Skaptadóttir, 2015), and in my study, many talk about incidents where they experienced racism. One woman said that, "it is because of our black hair. It is because people see us only as Filipinos, not as someone who might be interested in films or art." While there are stronger stereotypes about Filipino women in Iceland than about Filipino men, the women have been more prominent in Filipino organizations than the men. They have also played more active roles than men in the promotion of immigrant issues in Iceland, such as being contact persons for the Red Cross or local governments (Skaptadóttir, 2015).

The majority of immigrants from the Philippines, or 86.5%, who have been in Iceland for more than ten years have Icelandic citizenship, indicating long-term settlement plans (Skaptadóttir & Garðarsdóttir, in press). The majority keep strong ties with the Philippines and are engaged in life there. They send remittances and communicate regularly with their families in the Philippines. Many of them travel there on a regular basis to attend to property, visit their parents and other family, or to take part in important life events. These transnational ties, however, differ based on, for example, age, marital status and class. Very few of the women participating in the study left their children behind when going to Iceland. Most did not have children before arriving in Iceland, and those who did either arrived with them or were soon reunited with them. Thus, their remittances are mostly for their parents and, in some cases, also for siblings, nephews and nieces. Many of them had a parent or other relatives working abroad when they were growing up who sent remittances to their family.

Social networks among the participants living in Iceland consist mostly of people from the same area in the Philippines or of extended kin groups of various sizes. Many received help from these groups when first finding their way in Iceland. The extent to which they can use such networks to build their social capital and improve their position varies. The different ways to mobilize migrant capital play out in various ways in the following narratives from five women who participated in the research. Their individual stories highlight how they have been able to mobilize their capital to different degrees and in different ways both locally and transnationally.

#### *4.1. Five Women's Migration Trajectories*

##### *4.1.1. Grace*

Certain women who arrived in Iceland in the 1990s went on to arrange for many people to come to work in Iceland and have mobilized their capital to build a strong migrant network. These women have gained respect and commonly serve as intermediaries between local Filipinos and Icelanders. In a small town where I conducted field research, most of the Filipinos had arrived through chain migration that began with Grace. In this town, both Icelanders and Filipinos would point out how Grace was the most important person to talk with in the village to get information about Filipinos. Grace arrived with the help of her aunt who lives in Reykjavík just after finishing a college degree in business in the Philippines. She began to work in a job her aunt had arranged for her in food production. Soon after arrival, she met her Icelandic husband, and they moved together to the small town where they have lived since. She has been employed in a part-time cleaning job but has not found a way to use her education in relation to her work. She described how she began helping other Filipinos to come to Iceland, such as her sister Joselyn:

First, Joselyn came to help me with taking care of my child when I was working, and then my two cousins came, who I had found a job for in the fish processing, and then one of them went to England, and three more cousins then came here.

The other Filipinos in the town explained how thankful they were for her help, for example, with arranging jobs for them in Iceland, translating letters and going with them to offices and institutions when seeking various services. When asked about their familiarity with local services, many of them replied that they could just ask Grace. They said that they respected her and trusted the information she provided. Grace claimed that they, in fact, knew about these services: "I do not need to tell them, but I can help them, and I like helping them."

Grace and her husband are doing well economically as he is employed as a specialist in a stable office job. They live in a spacious house with a nice view of the ocean. The respect Grace has gained in the town primarily reflects her ability to mobilize her capital locally among Filipinos. Although Grace claimed in an interview that she has no social networks among Icelanders, Icelanders knew her and her central role in the Filipino community, and they claimed that she was more active in local life than most other Filipinos. Moreover, they claimed that her Icelandic was better, whereas most of the other Filipinos communicated mostly in English.

Many of the participants talked about how having social networks made up of extended family and people from their islands in the Philippines was an important reason for their well-being in Iceland. The networks made

life liveable in the harsh environment, darkness and difficult weather conditions in Iceland, with hard work of long hours. Grace said that:

It is not difficult to live here, especially now. Before, people came here with no family just to work. It can be difficult with no family to help you or to talk with. But now, people are here because their family is here. We, the Filipinos here, help each other, except for the two sisters you met the other day. Only my sister is in contact with them. They are not related to us and they keep to themselves and are not in much contact with other Filipinos here.

#### 4.1.2. Elsa

Not having a family network was often discussed in terms of vulnerability and lacking possibilities. Elsa came to Iceland with a friend through an Icelander they had met in the Philippines, who helped them find work cleaning in a hotel. Because her permission to stay in Iceland was dependent on this work, she said that she had to start working the day after arrival. Before coming to Iceland, she knew almost nothing about the country, and she had no connection to people in the Philippines who had relatives in Iceland. When I met her for the first time a few years after her arrival, she kept telling me: "I am all by myself." When I expressed my surprise and mentioned her Filipino and Icelandic friends and her Icelandic husband and daughters, she said that "it is not the same. I am all alone here." Later, she was able to arrange for her aunt to come to work in Iceland. The aunt brought her husband and two daughters.

Her father had worked abroad when Elsa was a child, but Elsa said that it was her maternal aunt's remittances that had been most important for financing her university education in hotel management. Elsa felt indebted to her aunt and wanted to help her move to Iceland. Today, Elsa has mostly Icelandic friends, and although she maintains friendships with a few women from the same region in the Philippines, she does not attend activities with other Filipinos or go to Catholic mass. She speaks Icelandic at home with her daughters and her husband. When she encountered problems in the past in relation to work and relationships, she says that she sought help from her Icelandic friends and did not want Filipinos to know of her problems. She speaks good Icelandic and has been able to use her education working in a hotel, especially after completing a master's degree. She explains, though, that, as an Asian woman, she has had to prove herself at work by doing everything twice as well as Icelanders. Moreover, she claims that she has observed less qualified Icelanders being promoted before her in the hotel where she is currently employed. She says that she feels better in Iceland now because her mother's sister and her family live there. Elsa keeps in touch with her family through social media, sends remittances to her parents and has invested

in housing for them in the Philippines, but rarely travels there. She claims that having an Icelandic husband, her light skinned daughters, a nice house and being in good economic standing confirms that she is a successful migrant. She thinks that it is more important for her daughters' futures to know English and Icelandic than her mother tongue. When traveling to the Philippines, it is important for her to show people there that she is doing well and that she can buy things for her family and take them out.

#### 4.1.3. Anna

Anna comes from an educated family in the Philippines and belongs to the cultural elite there. Her parents possessed a high amount of cultural, economic and social capital. They were highly educated and both had high positions in their fields of work. Their plan was for Anna to study medicine. She finished a nursing degree and went into medicine. Although she appreciated her parents concern for her future, she quit medicine to pursue a career as a journalist and an editor. About ten years later, she decided to seek a job as a nurse abroad at the request of her mother, who was seriously ill. The reason she chose Iceland as a destination was because some people from the region her father comes from were living in Iceland. They assisted with practicalities and offered Anna a place to stay upon arrival.

As with other nurses arriving from the Philippines, Anna began to work as a nursing assistant, but felt confident that she could do the job. Having already learned another language while living abroad before, Anna attended courses and learned Icelandic fast and was able to get the Icelandic nursing licence relatively quickly. She has been able to connect easily with Icelanders at work, including her managers. She has also been involved with writers' groups and has written for an English language magazine in Iceland. Thus, she has, to a larger extent than other participants, been able to transfer her cultural capital into the Icelandic context. In spite of this, she experienced a loss of social and cultural capital when moving to Iceland, where she says she is commonly perceived as "just a Filipino" or merely "an Asian woman." When promoted into a higher position at work, she found that some of her co-workers did not approve of the promotion because she is a foreigner.

Anna and her siblings, who also live and work as specialists abroad, send remittances to their father, who lives with a few live-in helpers and a relative who has come to the city to attend college. In addition to owning several properties that need to be attended to, they are landowners. Although the estate in the countryside is maintained financially through agriculture, they have responsibilities toward the tenants there. When I travelled with Anna to the countryside, we brought along many boxes of gifts in the spirit of the balikbayan boxes commonly sent from migrants to the Philippines as in-kind remittances to the caretakers and the tenants. Some of



these gifts were for certain individuals and other for communal use, such as some construction tools.

During her yearly visits to the Philippines, Anna stays in contact with friends and close relatives, and more distant relatives commonly seek assistance and advice from her. She also supports the education of a few children and one college student. She says that she has inherited all these responsibilities from her parents, responsibilities that contribute to the maintenance of her social and cultural capital. Anna has also been able to transfer her cultural capital to the Filipino community in Iceland. She is without a kin group in Iceland, but still belongs to a strong network of Filipinos in Iceland who come from the region of her father. Filipinos from her network are aware of the status of her family.

#### 4.1.4. Vanessa

Vanessa comes from a small rural village and her class position stands in contrast to Anna's. She comes from a rather economically deprived family, and similar to some other women in my study, she said that she had been interested in finding a Western man so that she would be able to move from the Philippines. Vanessa had been hoping to meet someone from the United States or Australia, but unlike some of the other participants of the study, she had not initiated any contact on the internet or by letter writing. She met her former husband while working in a nearby city and accepted his proposal to marry in the Philippines shortly after they met. Vanessa said that she had hoped that he was a good man. By marrying him, she anticipated that she would have had the opportunity to work in Iceland and help her family by sending them remittances. However, after arriving in Iceland to be with her husband, he turned out to be abusive and banned her from working outside the home and going to church. Despite this, Vanessa managed to get in touch with Filipinos who came from her island in the Philippines. They helped her escape the situation along with her son and to move to another town. When reflecting back on the decision to marry a man she hardly knew, she claimed that she, in a way, had to make this sacrifice for her family and said that "you have to understand, in the Philippines the family is everything." She later remarried, and she and her new husband helped her sister move to Iceland. She says that she knows only a few Icelanders through her current husband but not people whom she would consider to be friends or would ask for advice or help. She spends her free time mostly with other Filipinos, and her husband has, in a way, been integrated into her Filipino community.

Unlike most of the other participants in my study, Vanessa quit high school and her English is not as fluent as that of the other participants. In Iceland, she has been moving from one low-income job to another, where she has generally worked alone or with other foreigners. Thus, learning Icelandic has taken a long time. She stays in touch with her family back in the Philippines

on a daily basis through social media, but seldom visits them. When I visited her family in the Philippines, Vanessa had recently lost her job. Her husband, who has visited the family in the Philippines with her, is very supportive of sending remittances, but he is in a low-paid job as well. Although they did send money at the time, it was more sporadic than they would like. The parents expressed understanding of their limited remittances and said that they were lucky that they had other children abroad who could send them money as well. When I visited them, they lived in a small house with two daughters, a son-in-law and five grandchildren. They proudly showed me pictures of their successful migrant son in America. Vanessa was later able to send more remittances to her parents than before, and she claimed that moving to Iceland had greatly improved her life. She said that she is better off than she would have been if she would have stayed in the Philippines, and she is happy with her husband, who respects her as an equal partner.

#### 4.1.5. Rosa

Rosa had recently graduated with a teaching degree when she came to Iceland in the early 1990s. She had been considering writing letters to male pen pals in the United States with the goal of moving there, when her cousin in Iceland offered her a chance to come and work. As with many other foreign women at that time, she started working in a fish processing plant and later moved to a position cleaning in a hospital. She has not considered becoming a teacher in Iceland, but she did, for a short time, have a temporary job supporting immigrant children in a primary school. She married an Icelander after a few years and later arranged for her sister to join her in Iceland. She raises her children in what she refers to as "the Filipino way," including teaching them her mother tongue and respect for elders. Rosa now has a large network of relatives in Iceland, many of whom come from the same small community in the Philippines as her. The two sisters have helped many of these relatives and friends find work in Iceland. Her husband, like Vanessa's husband, is involved in a Filipino network and travels with her regularly to the Philippines. They have, in some cases, housed migrants from her hometown after they first arrived. Rosa sends money back to her elderly parents every month. She has also invested in a beautiful house in the town from which she comes. Although Rosa says that she has experienced racism, such as being told to go home in a public place, she generally feels happy in Iceland. She claims that, although she has had to work hard, she can provide her children with better futures in Iceland than in the Philippines.

A few years ago, Rosa and her sister played central roles in organizing a fiesta in the village they come from in the Philippines. In the months prior to their travel, they were engaged in funding activities such as parties with dinner, dancing and a lottery and selling various things.

A group of almost 50 persons, including children, then travelled from Iceland to the Philippines to participate in the fiesta. There, the group from Iceland decorated the village with flags and organized a parade. They paid for a wall to be painted in front of the church, for musicians and much more. At the fiesta, there were large gatherings with performances of regional dances. The group from Iceland proudly paid for the visit of a number of priests and a bishop who gave an inspirational speech at a mass in the local church.

In the mass, Rosa and her sister were honoured by the mayor and thanked for their efforts, and she gave a speech. Later that day, everyone gathered in a big hall. The visiting group provided many roasted pigs (*lechón*) and other food for everyone in the village. After that, many homes in the village were open to anyone to drop in for food and, in some cases, live music. A money dance, where people danced and hurled paper money onto the dance floor while dancing, was held in the evening. The money was then collected into baskets by young people to be used for the renovation of the sports area of the village. The participants from Iceland were visible in the dance and displayed their generosity. Similar to Grace, Rosa and her sister have central roles in a group of Filipinos in Iceland based on mobilizing their capital within the Filipino community. Unlike Grace, Rosa continues to build social and economic capital in the Philippines and participates in life there by travelling frequently, contributing to her family, organizing collective remittances to her village and engaging life there on a regular basis. In a way, she is more concerned with her position there than in Icelandic society.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

This article examines the positions and experiences of women from the Philippines who have migrated to Iceland. By focusing on the migration trajectories of five women, it highlights their migrant capital and how they apply local and transnational social networks when finding a way to improve their lives in a new society. Their stories show some similarities in their experiences of being racialized and categorized as Asians in Iceland, but they also illustrate important differences within the group in terms of their abilities to utilize their capital and build new forms of capital. Bourdieu's theories of social, economic and cultural capital highlight the importance of the class and hierarchical relations that affect the women as a minority group in Iceland. The theories are also reflected in the different positions the women hold. Bourdieu's theoretical perspectives, in addition, draw attention to people's agency in changing their positions within a social structure while navigating a new society. A transnational perspective sheds light on how different positions prior to migration and continuing ties with the Philippines play roles in this process.

The stories of the five women show both similarities and differences in migration trajectories. They all talked

repeatedly about their longing to make better lives for themselves and their families as the most important reasons for migration. They have also, in various ways, experienced prejudice at work or in Icelandic society. The women's stories depict important differences when it comes to their positions in Icelandic society and their abilities to mobilize migrant capital. It is clear from the women's stories that the social networks within which they mobilize their capital are not just based on nationality, but also to a varying degree on extended family ties and transnational connections within certain locations in the Philippines. Similar to Kelly and Lusis's (2006) study of Filipinos in Canada, the social networks of Filipinos in Iceland can be described as localizations of transnational ties with family and people from the same locality in the Philippines. Being from the Philippines may not, in and of itself, give access to such networks, as we saw with the two sisters left out of Grace's network (Paul, 2013).

Applying the Bourdieusian approach of social and cultural capital highlights how people do not start with the same resources in terms of social, economic or cultural capital because of the different class positions into which they are born. Three of the five women come from middle-class families in the Philippines, whereas Vanessa comes from a low-class family and Anna from a rather well-off family that emphasises cultural capital. These different class positions are reflected in, among other things, their educational backgrounds. Four of the five women have a college degree, and Elsa completed a master's degree after coming to Iceland. She and Anna have been able to apply their education in Iceland. Anna, in addition, has been able to transfer her cultural capital, in terms of her education and writing, to the Icelandic context. The other two, Rosa and Grace had both finished a college degree before emigrating from the Philippines but have not applied their education on the Icelandic labour market. Despite holding low-income jobs, Grace, being married to a man who has a good job, identifies with her role in the Filipino community of her town. Rosa claims that she did not really try hard to get her education evaluated. They have both been working in jobs typical for immigrant women, such as cleaning. Their experiences reflect the increasingly ethnically segregated work force in Iceland (Júlíusdóttir et al., 2013). As Kristjánsdóttir and Christiansen (2019) have pointed out, foreign born women are commonly overeducated. As visible minorities in Iceland, all five women been affected by racialization as Asians in Iceland, which is also evident in their labour market positions (Loftsdóttir, 2017; Skaptadóttir, 2015). Even Anna and Elsa, who have been able to work in their field of education, have been confronted with discriminatory practises at work.

From the stories of the five women, we can see the variety of ways in which the women apply their agency. Mobilizing migrant capital is not only about being able to utilize their education in the host society, as is evident in the cases of Grace and Rosa. Both have, instead, been able to activate social networks and build their cultural

capital by raising their status among a group of Filipinos in Iceland. In addition, Grace's position is also recognised by the Icelanders in her town. Her powerful position is, to some extent, based on her knowledge of Icelandic society and from other people being dependent on her. Moreover, she is well off economically as her husband has a good job and is highly educated. Rosa's capital building connects with both the near and the far, as her respect in Iceland among Filipinos is also reflected in symbolic capital in her home town where she has been able to maintain her cultural and social capital and contribute economically to her individual family and to the community by organizing collective remittances. Although Grace and Rosa have extensive migrant capital, it is only somewhat extended to Icelandic society in the case of Grace and very little in the case of Rosa.

Anna, who comes from a family with a great deal of social and cultural capital in the Philippines, did not have strong intentions to move to another country but only migrated because of her mother's encouragement. She has not focused much on strengthening her position among Filipinos because her position is relatively secure, and she has a strong network of Filipinos in Iceland, although she does not have relatives in Iceland. Instead, she has emphasized maintaining the position of the family back in the Philippines and mobilizing her resources to build her capital in Icelandic society. The different possibilities between her and Vanessa, and to some extent the other three women, show the importance of considering migrant capital in terms of how class intersects with individual motivations or family networks.

Unlike Anna, Vanessa had very little capital on which she could build as she did not have an education or any Filipino family in Iceland when she arrived. For her, marriage to a foreign man was a way to migrate and to help her family in need. Not having any relatives in Iceland, she was able to seek help from women coming from the same locality in the Philippines. Elsa's middle-class family had invested in her education, but like Vanessa, she had no kin when she came to Iceland. She could build on the education she had acquired prior to migration to improve her position in the hotel sector. Since arriving in Iceland, she has capitalized on her education and on becoming part of Icelandic society, more or less ignoring the Filipino community and not teaching her children her mother tongue. Although not maintaining strong ties with people in the Philippines, she proudly contributes to the welfare of her close family there with regular remittances.

Through transnational ties, migrants are able to maintain and improve social capital (Kelly & Lusi, 2006). As we can see, some of the women draw on the formal and informal resources available to them in Iceland and on their transnational social field, such as their extended kin groups in Iceland and networks in the Philippines, to build their social capital both in Iceland and in the Philippines. The study shows that the transnational social field can be important and that mobilizing capital can be

part of strengthening an individual's position. For both Anna and Rosa, the transnational and local levels are very much interconnected, and their migrant capital cannot be understood from only examining either the Icelandic or the Filipino local level. However, their transnational connections are very different and reflect their different position in the Philippines, where Anna was born into a family with a lot of capital. The women's transnational practices and utilization of resources to build migrant capital takes place in the context of a Filipino national ideology that encourages people to leave in order to care for those left behind. Most of the participants in my study emphasised this as an important factor in their decision to migrate. At the same time, the structural context of racialization and class position in Iceland affects their positions. While having improved their positions based on stronger economic, and in some cases social and cultural, capital, they have also experienced prejudice as Asians in Iceland. The individual stories analysed in the article demonstrate how the women can mobilize their resources, but the degree to which they can do this varies because of structural features such as class and racialization intersecting and displaying heterogeneity and hierarchies among Filipinos and within Icelandic society.

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### Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

## **Welfare beyond Borders: Filipino Transnational Families’ Informal Social Protection Strategies**

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### **Abstract**

Remittances and caregiving arrangements are among the most significant practices of informal social protection against social risks and exclusion among transnational families. This article argues that remittances can provide social protection in cases where formal welfare services do not reach the citizens properly. Furthermore, it illustrates how members of Filipino transnational families can create sustainable informal social protection and utilise it long-term. The transnational practices are analysed to show how migrant capital, particularly the intersection of economic and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), is transferred to informal social protection through meaningful reciprocity between the senders and recipients of remittances. Successful allocation of remittances and negotiation of care arrangements depend on the realisation of reciprocity and its social context, such as life circumstances, moral obligations and migrants’ personal goals for migration. The data draw on observations and 41 qualitative interviews conducted both in Finland and in the Philippines.

### **Keywords**

caregiving; informal social protection; Filipino transnational families; migrant capital; social capital; reciprocity; remittances

### **Issue**

This article is part of the issue “Social Inclusion beyond Borders: Utilization of Migrant Capital in Transnational and Diaspora Communities” edited by Sanna Saksela-Bergholm (University of Helsinki, Finland), Mari Toivanen (University of Helsinki, Finland) and Östen Wahlbeck (University of Helsinki, Finland).

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### **1. Introduction**

An unstable economy followed by under- and unemployment in the Philippines has made the country one of the biggest labour-exporting states in the world. Remittances have become a significant form of informal social protection for many migrants and their families, including Filipino labour migrants and their family members who remain in the Philippines (Avato, Koettel, & Sabates-Wheeler, 2010, p. 463; Bilecen & Sienkiewicz, 2015). In addition, caregiving arrangements are an informal transnational practice that has become an evident part of informal social protection for numerous transnational families (Boccagni, 2017; Faist & Bilecen, 2015). The number of Filipino families in immediate need of formal social benefits would be far larger without remittances sent by the relatives working abroad. This article discusses Filipino transnational families’ strategies to

manage remittances and caregiving arrangements in a sustainable way, providing family members with informal social protection and access to social services and education in the Philippines. Attention is given to Filipino transnational families consisting of Filipino labour migrants living in Finland and of their family members in the Philippines. Access to informal social protection strengthens the families’ inclusion in Filipino society and reduces their risk of falling into poverty. The latter indicates falling under the food and poverty threshold, which in 2015 was estimated as PhP 9,140 (159 EUR) for covering food and non-food needs of a family consisting of five persons (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019a). At its best, informal social protection can extend beyond the family to others who are not kin, for instance by recruiting locals to innovative business or by facilitating a microloan for everyday consumption. I argue that informal social protection is a significant addition to for-

mal social protection, particularly if the former provides long-term protection for the non-migrant members of transnational families.

Formal social protection mainly comprises state-led interventions, such as social insurance, social subsidies and other social services, as well as labour market initiatives for its citizens and to a certain extent non-citizens (Faist, 2017). In contrast, informal social protection refers to poverty and risk-reducing strategies provided by actors' social ties and networks (Sabates-Wheeler & Feldman, 2011). In this article, informal social protection is studied from the perspective of the migrants and their relatives who are not part of the formal social protection system in the Philippines. Attention is given to the allocation of remittances and to the use of reciprocity in the creation of informal social protection, such as caregiving arrangements. Members of the migrants' safety nets, such as care providers of children and older relatives left behind, are significant actors enabling the migration process of working-age family members. Attention has been given to the developmental use of remittances (de Haas, 2005; Eversole & Johnson, 2014) but less work has been done to determine the process of informal social protection and whether transnational families are able to allocate their remittances and care practices sustainably in the long term. The examples described here illuminate opportunities for and hindrances to informal social protection among family members still living in the Philippines.

The informal social protection strategies of transnational families are analysed through their utilisation of so-called migrant capital, which becomes meaningful through reciprocal negotiation between the senders and recipients of remittances. Migrant capital refers here to diverse forms of capital consisting mainly of economic (remittances and savings) and social capital (trust, information, social ties and networks) that the transnational families create and utilise separately or combined (Bourdieu, 1986). Successful allocation of remittances, for example migrants' economic support for their siblings who remain at home, depends on the realisation of reciprocity and its social context, such as life circumstances, moral obligation and, to a certain extent, personal goals (Asis, Huang, & Yeoh, 2004; Conway & Cohen, 1998). Life changes, such as children graduating or ageing parents passing away, can influence the need for informal social protection among the recipients, whereas moral obligations to send remittances can strongly guide migrants' commitment to do so. Nevertheless, migrants' personal goals for migration, such as empowerment or accessing a new culture, can redirect the focus from the family left behind to the new life situation.

This article is based on a multi-site study consisting of observations and 41 interviews, conducted among Filipino migrants working in Finland and their families still living in the Philippines. Insight into the lives of the families left behind furthered understanding of how remittances functioned as mechanisms of informal so-

cial protection. A comparison of the answers from the senders and receivers of remittances provided a thorough picture of the strategies based on migrant capital.

## 2. Filipino Labour Migration

The Filipino diaspora, which is strongly labour based, can be interpreted as part of globalisation (Parreñas, 2015; Sassen, 2000). The Philippines has become famous for commodifying its English-speaking work force, a consequence of the colonial period under the United States (1898–1946). English is still the formal language in higher education, although primary school pupils are also taught in Filipino. At the end of September 2018, more than 2.3 million Filipinos were working abroad. The number comprises Filipino overseas contract workers who had an existing contract to work abroad as well as Filipino overseas migrants working full time without a work permit (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019b). Remittances sent by overseas Filipino workers make an important contribution to the gross domestic product of the Philippines. By December 2018, the value of remittances amounted to US\$3.2 billion, an increase of 3.0 percent from the previous year (Banko Sentral ng Pilipinas, 2019).

The first Filipinos arrived in Finland at the beginning of the 1970s, mainly due to marriage (Ruutu Zurbano, 2007). During the last 20 years the Filipino community has increased as a result of labour migration. At the beginning of 2018, the number of Filipino citizens living in Finland was 4,344, of which 2,867 were female and 1,477 were male (Statistics Finland, 2019).

Since 2007, Finnish recruitment companies have collaborated with Filipino recruitment companies to recruit a workforce for occupations in sectors with a shortage of employees, such as the health care, hotel and restaurant sectors (see also Näre, 2012; Vartiainen-Ora, 2015). In addition to these occupational groups, direct recruitment of domestic workers and cleaners has become popular among Finnish families who previously lived in the Philippines and Filipino private entrepreneurs in Finland.

## 3. The Intersection of Formal and Informal Social Protection in Migration Studies

The global social protection discourse has mainly focused on the formal social protection systems of governments in their efforts to reduce poverty, income differences and other dimensions of inequality (OECD, 2016). Recent studies have shown that there is a need to expand national social protection programmes transnationally to protect migrants (Levitt, Viterna, Mueller, & Lloyd, 2017; Sabates-Wheeler & Feldman, 2011). However, I argue in line with Dankyi, Mazzucato, and Manuh (2017) that migrants' families still living in the home country also need to be seen as part of global social protection systems. Many families living in the Philippines rely on informal social protection facilitated by relatives abroad in addition

to the national social protection programme. This is essential for issues such as social services for persons with special needs but also for provision of basic needs such as food and education. In some cases, child—or elder-care arrangements between relatives can replace formal care. Another form of protection is that against immediate economic needs and other unexpected livelihood risks or shocks (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004).

Researchers into global social protection of migrants, including its transnational forms, are increasingly exploring and criticising the role of states and local governments (Levitt et al., 2017). Attention has been given to migrants' access to social protection programmes and to the portability and maintenance of social security rights and benefits, such as pensions (Sabates-Wheeler & MacAuslan, 2007). At the same time, attention has been given to the role of remittances in non-migrants' welfare, social inclusion and equal participation in society (Carling, 2008; Eversole & Shaw, 2010), as well as to the developmental use of remittances in non-migrant households (Eversole & Johnson, 2014; Luova, 2014). In reality, the line between formal and informal social protection often remains obscured for migrants and their families (Boccagni, 2017; Faist, Bilecen, Barglowski, & Sienkiewicz, 2015).

In the Philippines the governmental social protection programme, or the 4Ps (*Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program*) is restricted to households in immediate economic need and who have children under 14 years of age. In reality, the number of households not living in immediate poverty, but without sufficient incomes to cover the costs of education and/or social and health care, is large. Lack of sufficient income goes hand in hand with migration. Migration has become part of the Filipino culture (OECD & Scalabrini Migration Center, 2017). In many families it has become a tradition to have someone abroad working for the welfare of those who remain at home:

Actually, many people who live here are working abroad as well. Most of the families here have someone, at least one person, who works abroad. If you just work here, I don't think it will be easy for you to progress. (Male, return migrant from Luzon)

Boccagni (2017, p. 120) argues that analysing informal social protection and its mechanisms is revealing in the following ways: "First, the potential for remittances and transnational care to meet recipient needs of economic, psycho-social and health support; second, the spill-over of these practices onto pre-existing welfare representations, cultures and institutional arrangements in home societies." What is noteworthy is the transnational dimension of the protection provided for migrants and non-migrants in the same household. This article attempts to advance the discussion by identifying strategies of informal social protection being used within a transnational context, by Filipino labour migrants in Finland and their family members in the Philippines. The

focus is on the latter's sustainable well-being, such as caregiving and education.

#### 4. Migrant Capital as an Informal Social Protection Strategy

During the migration process, transnational family members create, allocate and deploy forms of capital beneficial for them, referred to here as 'migrant capital.' This article aims to further the discussion begun in previous studies on migrant capital (Paul, 2015; Ryan, Erel, & D'Angelo, 2015) by showing how transnational families can use migrant capital as a strategy for accessing informal social protection. Migrant capital can be both a resource and an outcome of migration process. Migrants utilise diverse forms of capital during their migration, notably only those forms of capital which are beneficial for them can be described as migrant capital (Anthias, 2007). Simultaneously, during the migration trajectories, transnational activities and maintenance of social ties, migrants allocate and transform capital to new types of capital (cf. Erel, 2010). Here, the focus is mainly on economic and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The former refers to remittances and savings used to improve family members' well-being and protection from poverty, whereas the latter consists of information, trust, social ties and networks utilised by transnational family members. In practice, capital is often a combination of the two forms. For example, school attendance or regular use of medicine among family members still living in the Philippines may depend on regular monetary transactions. In turn, transactions depend on the social relations and trust between senders and recipients (Carling, 2014).

Furthermore, the accumulation and deployment of capital requires reciprocity between the migrants and non-migrants in a transnational family. For example, migrants often have a moral obligation to send money to educate their children or close relatives, whereas spouses, grandparents or other close relatives are committed to taking care of these children (Carling, 2014; Saksela-Bergholm, 2018). In this way, family members can deploy economic capital through social capital by converting economic capital for educational use. Social capital is utilised by migrants in their access to new job opportunities and migration destinations and in their efforts to help their families and other members of the same ethnic group (Ryan et al., 2015). However, migrant capital loses its significance when it cannot be utilised beneficially by family members, or when it has a negative consequence for them, such as a lack of trust within the family or the community at large (Portes & Landolt, 1996).

The importance of remittances depends on the life circumstances of transnational family members (Conway & Cohen, 1998). For example, recovery from illness can decrease the sending of remittances or payments on a house loan, and can prolong the stay of the sender abroad. Meanwhile, migrants' own goals for staying abroad can be connected with motives of personal em-

powerment, marriage and/or settlement in a new society (Asis et al., 2004). These personal goals can weaken the bond between transnational family members and even demotivate the migrants to send remittances.

Transnational families can benefit greatly from regular remittances sent by their relatives abroad, by allocating and investing them in a sustainable way, such as in education. As de Haas (2005, p. 7) states, “[d]epending on the specific development context at the sending end, remittances may enable households to retreat from, just as much as to invest in, local economic activities.” In other words, successful use of remittances as a form of informal social protection depends on family members’ strategies to use migrant capital. Successful allocation of remittances among transnational families can improve living conditions and social inclusion through access to health services and education. Other positive long-term effects can be achieved through investments, such as a small start-up entrepreneurship, or maintaining the productivity of a farm. Additionally, savings for retirement can provide important additional social protection for those migrants who intend to return to their country of origin with an inadequate social protection for its citizens. However, in the long term there is a risk of increased poverty at the community level if the remaining households do not have the means to maintain local productivity (de Haas, 2005). Unsuccessful allocation of remittances or lack of allocation can make non-migrants more dependent on the migrants and worsen living conditions. As an unintended outcome, this can create poverty among the family members and limit the availability of social protection, leading to an outcome of social exclusion rather than social inclusion (see Figure 1).

## 5. Research Methods and Data

Initially, George E. Marcus (1995) demonstrated in his article on multi-sited ethnography the significance of such an approach to discovering how social relations are connected through parallel contexts, summarised by Falzon (2009, p. 2) this in the following way:

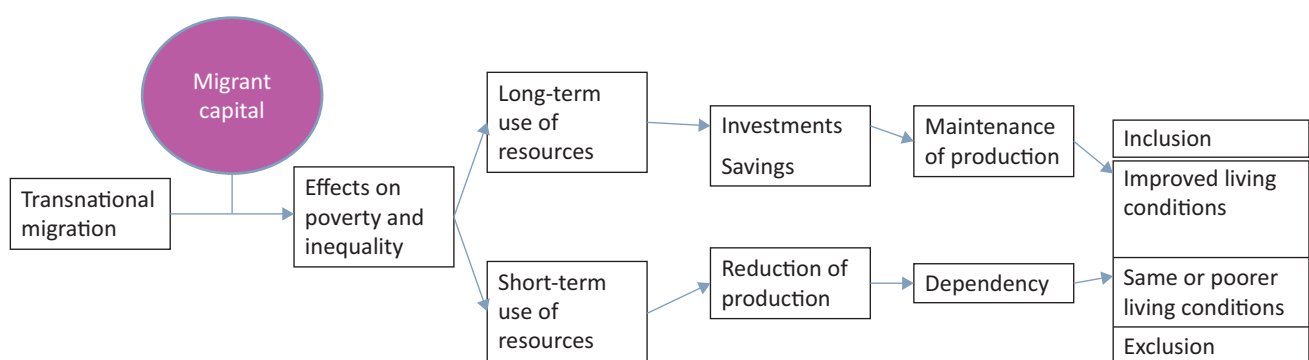
Research design proceeds by a series of juxtapositions in which the global is collapsed into and made an in-

tegral part of parallel, related local situations, rather than something monolithic or external to them. In terms of method, multi-sited ethnography involves a spatially dispersed field through which the ethnographer moves—actually, via sojourns in two or more places, or conceptually, by means of techniques of juxtaposition of data.

I applied a multi-sited ethnographic approach for collecting data about informal social protection practices among transnational Filipino migrants and their family members still living in the Philippines. Multi-sited ethnography is suitable for discovering social, cultural and symbolic changes taking place among members of a society who live a cross-border life, or who move between two or several places. This has become a popular approach for several migrant scholars exploring and describing migrant trajectories. For example, Mazzucato (2009) and her research team conducted a study on Ghanaian migrants’ use of informal insurance arrangements by exploring the migrants’ networks simultaneously in four different research sites.

A multi-sited approach consisting of interviews and participant observations enabled the compiling of information and knowledge about how transnational practices provided informal social protection but also provided an insight into the changes, improvements and possible deterioration in the lives of transnational family members. This approach was useful particularly for obtaining information on both the migrants and non-migrants in a household. In addition to interviews, participant observations also became an important tool for gaining further knowledge. As Maurice Bloch has argued, cognitive non-linguistic ethnographic understanding can be crucial for discovering the social changes that take place in the lives of respondents (Bloch, 1991).

This article consists of participant observations and, in total, 41 semi-structured interviews, collected in two stages. The first stage comprised 28 Filipino labour migrants working in the capital area of Helsinki. During 2013 and 2015, I interviewed 17 Filipino women and 11 men, of whom the majority were 31–40 years old. They had been recruited either by a Finnish recruitment company or a family; the study excluded persons who



**Figure 1.** The use of migrant capital as an informal social protection strategy for family members left behind.

had moved to Finland for family reunification reasons. The informants consisted of seven cleaners; six cooks; ten domestic workers; two nurses and two personal care assistants. I had used two key informants and the snow-ball method to find the informants. The study focused on how Filipino labour migrants had obtained access to the Finnish labour market and welfare system by creating and using social capital, which consisted of local and transnational ties and practices.

The second stage took place between January and February 2017. It focused on the living conditions and access to social protection of the families left behind. The data consisted of eight semi-structured interviews among family members, mainly spouses or mothers of eight Filipino labour migrants working in Finland. In some cases, the husband and/or (grown-up) children provided additional information on the significance of migration and remittances in the lives of relatives still living in the Philippines. Additionally, four return migrants and one non-migrant were interviewed. The former provided information about the reasons for return and hindrances related to migration, whereas the latter explained how he and his son were seasonally recruited by one of the transnational families interviewed for this study. The number of families interviewed remained small because of their scattered locations, i.e., the focus was on families who could be reached within the existing time-frame of eight weeks, excluding those who lived in politically restless areas (such as the Bukidnon area, Marawi City and its surrounding in Mindanao). The interviews took place mainly in Southern and Northern Luzon and Central Visayas. A research assistant helped with both interpretation and the practical arrangements during the fieldwork.

Both stages focused on the following themes: the migration process (e.g., motives, decision-making); economic remittances (amount, frequency and use); social remittances (exchange of information, knowledge and innovations, investments and maintenance of traditions); ways of staying in contact (visits, use of IT tools); possible care arrangements for children and elderly relatives in the Philippines; safety nets and future plans (e.g., family reunification, return migration). All interviews also included open-ended questions, giving room for insightful answers, such as descriptions of social ties and networks. All informants were assured of anonymity at the beginning of the interviews and pseudonyms are used in the articles.

The analysis was done both manually and by Atlas.ti. By re-reading the transcripts and by coding the data with the help of the qualitative computer program it was possible to discover essential categories emphasising dimensions of informal social protection, such as: size, frequency and use of remittances; the significance of social ties, reciprocity between the migrants and non-migrants; life changes (marriage, graduation of siblings, health changes of older relatives); and potential economic dependency of non-migrants on migrant family members.

## 6. Informal Social Protection Strategies among Filipino Transnational Families

Despite the fact that the transnational families interviewed for this study were not at immediate risk of poverty, they still needed regular remittances to cater for expenses related to caregiving and education. The use of remittances among the family members of the migrants in the Philippines are based on answers received from the 32 current or former labour migrants participating in this study. The foremost use of remittances related to informal social security were for education (18/32 respondents) and for the caregiving of family members (17/32, of which ten respondents sent remittances for the care-taking of children and seven for their ageing parents). Five (5/32) transnational households used remittances as their main income either occasionally or regularly. Those who only occasionally depended on remittances were farmers who faced economic uncertainty because of natural disasters, such as heavy monsoon rains or typhoons. In addition, indirect use of remittances for family members' well-being took place in the form of investments (13/32), and savings (12/32). The former could consist of diverse forms of economic productivity, such as a small entrepreneurship, a loan for property (e.g., a house or land), whereas savings were planned to be used for prospect investment for a possible return to the Philippines after their retirement in Finland. In the future, these kinds of long-term savings can function as an additional retirement source for migrants and their family members.

The majority of the respondents interpreted social protection as predominately an informal arrangement provided by family members working abroad. Utilisation of remittances as informal social protection was perceived as a necessity to avoid falling into poverty, or as the mother of a Filipino cook expressed it: "[It's] for the medicine, our daily meals...everything that is needed in the house. Everything I get from them [children living abroad]. Because we don't have our own income, only their remittances." Instead, formal social protection provided by the government of the Philippines were mainly thought as a 4P subsidy system intended for those citizens who did not have any other incomes, or as a return migrant explained: "I think we have an exoneration here, but only for the chosen few, for those who really have nothing. As far as I know they receive monthly 4Ps." The examples beneath illustrate the allocation of remittances for the improvement of the family members' well-being in the Philippines. The examples also show how different forms of capital have been used, allocated and in some cases turned into new forms of capital.

### 6.1. Remittances as Main Income

In some cases, remittances were essential to the welfare of family members still living in the Philippines. The data revealed that five families used the remittances as their main income because of un—or underemployment. As



the wife of a cook who worked in Finland expressed it: “We have a monthly allocation from Antonio for our daily expenses—for food, for electricity, for the tuition fees, for the groceries. I also make sure that I have extra money for emergency funds. This is our main source.” The only opportunity for these families to allocate remittances in a sustainable way was to invest in their children’s education, whereas the rest was used to cover daily living expenses. In some families, the main income comprised remittances or money from occasional small business transactions, such as selling products from a ‘sari-sari’ shop or bakery products, as Meg’s mother, a domestic worker, explained:

Here, in front of our house I had a small one [restaurant]. However, these kinds of businesses do not really last long. Mine, I had for two years. Because now the businesses are in the malls. People go there now, so smaller businesses became weak. Occasionally I sell rice cakes. It is more like a hobby, but at the same time I get extra money. I can buy what I want. But monthly, they [her daughters abroad] send me money for our expenses, but that won’t be enough if I rely solely on that.

As the quotation above shows, recipients of remittances relied not only on remittances, but tried to increase their economy by running a small business, such as a small grocery shop, (a ‘sari-sari’ store), or by selling bakery products. Both forms of incomes were essential for covering the food, health care and other needs of the households.

### 6.2. Remittances as an Investment

In addition to the previously mentioned forms of informal social protection, it is worth mentioning respondents’ use of their earnings for investments or planned investments. Almost half of the respondents (13 out of 32) had invested in property, such as a house or land, whereas 12 respondents mentioned saving money for their possible retirement in the Philippines. Both forms can be seen as a significant additional form of informal social protection for the migrants themselves and their family members left behind. Meanwhile, the migrants working in Finland could take care of their families in the home country as well as contribute money to purchasing a house. As Ernesto, a cook, explained: “Now, I have built a house next to my parents-in-law. It is much safer. Before we lived near a lake with mosquitoes. But now there are no mosquitoes. This is much safer!” Dengue fever is a serious health risk in several parts of the Philippines. Moving away from a risk area is not always possible for families with low incomes. In the case of Ernesto’s family, changing residence was possible thanks to salaries earned overseas.

Some of the transnational families managed to allocate economic remittances in a sustainable way, like the family of Arnel, whose parents worked as farmers. Arnel

worked as a cook in Finland and had managed to improve the welfare of his parents and sister while working abroad. First, he worked in Saudi Arabia as a cook and sent remittances to support their farm and his sister’s education. Later on, when he moved to Finland and got a bigger salary, he increased the monthly remittances. This has been a substantial help for their livelihood for his family, as Arnels’ mother explained:

We use the remittances as capital for the rice fields, and then the earnings from the rice fields we use for our basic needs. Before we could not afford employees for the rice fields but now [when we receive remittances] we can hire some.

According to Arnel’s mother, they had also used the remittances for building a house extension and for opening a ‘sari-sari’ shop. In this way, allocation of economic capital created human capital in the form of a temporary workforce and long-term cultural capital after his sister’s graduation.

Similarly, some other respondents had invested in property with the aim of having a house or apartment later on for themselves in case they returned to the Philippines. More than half of the respondents who worked in Finland saved money for the time they planned to move back to their country of origin. Although only a few of them had clear retirement plans, the respondents still highlighted their interest in moving back after their retirement, or as some of them expressed ‘after their active working years.’

### 6.3. Remittances as a Source of Education

In the Philippines, education is highly valued. For example, Dora, a domestic worker in a Finnish family, had supported her three brothers’ education by sending monthly remittances (around 200 EUR) back home. At the time of the interview, she had only one year left to support her youngest brother. For her, migration was not only an opportunity to help her family but also a moral obligation, as she recalled her time in her previous working destination: “In Hong Kong it was difficult, because of the working hours...I really sacrificed for my brothers, but if I had stopped [working] they would also have stopped studying.” Life changes, such as rice farms destroyed after a typhoon or similar natural disaster, at times made her family economically dependent on her. During my visit to Dora’s parents’ home in a small remote farmer’s house at Visayas, it became obvious how important the remittances were for the family. In addition to education, remittances were used for house and farm maintenance. Occasionally, the family members were totally dependent on the monetary transactions sent by Dora, for example when their harvest had been destroyed by typhoons or heavy monsoons. For the parents and the two brothers who still lived at home, Dora’s economic support was essential. Dora had a sister, who had been

a domestic worker in Singapore, but who was currently unemployed in Manila. Dora tried to use both her previous contacts and occupational expertise to find a job for her sister in Hong Kong. Dora's case shows how the allocation of economic capital can create cultural capital in the form of education in the long term.

Similarly, Meg and her siblings sent regular remittances back home to support the education of their younger sister. However, the sisters looked for new opportunities to educate themselves, or to find a better job, as their mother expressed it:

Imelda [Meg's younger sister] is studying Business Administration. It is a joint effort of Meg and her elder siblings to send Imelda to school to help us with our expenses. But, because of the expense of goods nowadays, it is not enough....The girls there [in Finland], they want to study to improve their life. So, they do not want to work as nannies, [but] to get a job with a higher salary.

The quotation above shows how the remittances are not only needed for school fees but also for daily utilities on account of inflation. According to the respondents, the price of daily groceries had tripled over the last few months. Moreover, Meg also took care of her biological mother who lived in another village than her aunt. Meg sent remittances to her mother who used these for her diabetes medicine. Moral obligations tied Meg to providing social protection for her relatives by sending them monthly remittances. At the same time, Meg wished to educate herself and improve her life: "It depends on what tomorrow brings because I would like to study here [in Finland] and get a degree in education. And it depends on my visa because I only have a one-year residence permit." This quotation shows how Meg had a wish to improve her life, but was unable to invest in it further as she did not have a study visa.

#### 6.4. Caregiving as Informal Social Protection

Caregiving arrangements are an important part of informal social protection in transnational families (Boccagni, 2011; Dankyi et al., 2017). Regular use of virtual connections, such as Skype or WhatsApp, helps the transnational families stay in touch. Online communication provides a means for negotiating the use of remittances and caregiving practices for children and older relatives (Madianou, 2012). The importance of a good virtual connection was stressed by the informants. For example, Maria was a domestic worker in Finland, while her husband worked as a cook in Norway. She decided to send their 16-month-old baby, who they were unable to take care of by themselves, to Maria's parents-in-law in the Philippines because they had good access to the internet. Maria's parents, on the other hand, lived in a small village up in the mountains where the internet connection was poor. Leila had also been sending remittances

back home for years, and according to her sister these remittances had improved their life significantly:

We were able to buy a motorcycle, renovate the house, and help the nieces and nephews in studying. Leila has been the main source of funds for our mother's medical assistance. After she had a heart attack, she became bed-ridden and my task was to take care of her. (Ana, Leyla's sister)

During my visit to Leila's home village, I saw their old stilt house or nipa hut and visited their new brick house with modern furniture, tile floors and windows with bars. The care arrangements between the sisters provided improved living conditions and caregiving by Leila's family members. An investment in a house can also be seen as a sustainable investment and profit for the sisters in the long run. At the same time, Leyla's sister did not have any opportunities to look for another job and depended on the remittances sent by Leyla.

In some cases, the allocation of remittances was less successful. Louisa, a return migrant and former domestic worker, had to return to the Philippines due to a lack of trust between her and her husband. He was supposed to take care of their children while she was working in Dubai to repay their house loan. Instead, he spent the money on gambling. Unfortunately, this family did not manage to use remittances in a sustainable way, but had to go back to square one, as Louisa recalls: "The remittances were our only source of income, but the children told me that they weren't able to benefit from them because their father was spending it elsewhere."

## 7. Discussion

Without overseas Filipino workers' devotion to working abroad for the well-being of their family members left behind it would not be possible to improve the availability of social protection. Reciprocal arrangements of remittances and caregiving are the core elements in offering informal social protection to family members still living in the Philippines. The deployment of economic and social capital, encompassing remittances, social ties and trust, provided members of transnational families with improved housing and education.

As the previous examples have shown, remittances received by the overseas family members make an important contribution to the household budget. Without the remittances, it would be difficult and, in some cases, impossible to survive economically. Informal social protection is not only about monetary transfers. Social capital, such as social ties, information and knowledge play an important role in creating both material and non-material welfare. Some transnational families managed to allocate their economic capital in a meaningful way by utilising their social capital strategically.

The type of economic dependency by the family members left behind exhibits two kinds of strategies,

namely *coping* and *adaptive* strategies (Devereux, 2001). The first strategy relates to the transnational family members' capability to face unexpected economic recession, such as unemployment or illness of a family member. Whereas, the second consists of an adaptive strategy used by families who are highly vulnerable to long-term income depression (Devereux, 2001, p. 512). Families who utilised remittances as an additional income relied mainly on an adaptive strategy to help them improve their livelihood, such as Arnel's family, who allocated capital from economic to human capital by recruiting seasonal workers during the harvest. Additionally, Arnel's mother invested the remittances by opening a small grocery enterprise, bringing further additional income to the family. Dora's story in turn illustrates two significant uses of migrant capital as a form of adaptive strategy. Firstly, it shows how her parents appreciated education, seeing it as a way for their sons to find decent jobs and as a way out of poverty. They appreciated the long-term economic support of their daughter, who had sacrificed her own educational opportunities for her brother's sake. Secondly, Dora tried to find her sister a job by utilising her social capital, occupational skills and knowledge.

The majority of the respondents expressed the need for regular remittances and long-term caregiving arrangements as a coping strategy to survive economic uncertainty and the risk of social exclusion from state-led services. By providing an education for their children, parents aimed to offer an opportunity to graduate and obtain better jobs and opportunities in life than their parents. By allocating economic capital in the long term through trusted social ties, the migrants and their family members could create a new form of cultural capital, i.e., forms of capital were converted to a novel type of capital (cf. Erel, 2010). For example, Arnel had sent remittances for his sister's education until she graduated. Despite her graduation she had not found any work and decided to look for a job abroad. As de Haas (2005) states, successful migration can initiate further migration and even cause brain drain. The members of many Filipino families like Arnel's found migration to be a solution to escape poverty and a venue to provide help and social protection for family members staying at home, even if they were aware that migration can create further migration. Still, as long as families in the Philippines live on the edge of poverty it is a thrilling opportunity to move abroad for work.

Some remittances lead to sustainable social protection. At its best, diverse forms of capital can be allocated profitably providing social protection and increasing sustainable livelihood for migrants' family members living in the Philippines. For example, Meg's and Antonio's families had some other income than the remittances as their main income. In their case, remittances were used as an adaptation strategy to overcome poverty in the long term.

Caregiving arrangements in transnational families are also closely connected to migrants' opportunities to

send remittances and to stay in touch with their family members back home. Allocation of economic capital to informal social protection is sometimes indirectly based on reciprocity and commitment between the sender and recipients of remittances (Dankyi et al., 2017). As the cases of Maria and Louisa showed, transnational caregiving made it possible to remain apart from their children. The role of social capital became evident in the examples of these domestic workers. Both of them relied on their parents-in-law or spouse back home. Unfortunately, lack of commitment by Louisa's husband led to unsuccessful allocation of remittances. In Maria's case a mutual negotiation of childcare with her husband's parents enabled a transnational caregiving arrangement.

Migration in itself can be an informal social protection for some of the transnational families, where the decision to allocate remittances for the well-being of the family members left behind is done in agreement between the migrants and non-migrants. Successful allocation of migrant capital requires reciprocal commitment from both ends. Despite a consensus between the family members, it also became for the migrants a moral obligation or expectation to send remittances. Despite migrants' personal goals, their foremost interest was to take care of the family members and in some cases of other close relatives left behind. A decisive feature of the allocation of migrant capital, requiring more attention in future research, is the social protection and well-being of the migrants who in several cases are the breadwinners for their families living in their country of origin.

## 8. Conclusion

Migration has become part of Filipino culture. This article has discussed the significance of informal social protection for those Filipino families who live on the brink of immediate poverty, but remain in the Filipino middle or lower middle class thanks to the remittances sent by their family members working in Finland. Without regular remittances these families would not have the sufficient means to cover school or health care costs. Migration in itself does not provide social informal protection to family members left behind, but it can contribute significantly to the social protection of those left behind if the overseas family members are committed to regularly sending remittances back home and a consensus exists about the use of remittances between the senders and recipients.

The data showed how, through allocation of economic capital through family ties based on trust and solidarity, children or siblings left behind received the opportunity to acquire an education and possibly graduate. Strategic use of migrant capital not only prevents deprivation and poverty, but can also create a new form of capital, cultural capital based on education, which is highly valued by Filipinos regardless of class background. Another strategic use of remittances by transnational families is investment in property, such as a house or

land. It is possible to get sustainable incomes by investing remittances in forms of production, such as a grocery store or a farm. Successful agriculture can provide seasonal jobs for neighbours. Additional income from a seasonal job can be a significant source of livelihood for neighbours who would otherwise be un- or underemployed and dependent on governmental social benefits.

In the future, migration studies could pay more attention to the allocation of migrant capital among those transnational families whose livelihood and well-being depend on remittances. Migrant capital can make a sustainable change in the lives of those left behind when it is allocated strategically. Transnational families may rely on coping strategies that focus on basic needs, such as food and housing, should no other substantial incomes be available, whereas those families who use remittances as an additional income utilise migrant capital as adaptive strategies to create sustainable social protection. In addition, the expectations and images of non-migrants are in some cases contradictory to the migrants' experiences and expectations of transnational support. During the years spent apart, the life conditions of both the migrants and their family members may change and influence the need for remittances. This can lead to further migration among relatives who have found the migration trajectories of their siblings successful. Despite the fact that transnational informal social protection strategies can protect family members back home from immediate poverty, a stronger interplay of the formal and informal social protection in the Philippines proves to be important for its citizens.

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### Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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### About the Author



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Article

## **Transnational Social Capital in Migration: The Example of Student Migration from Bulgaria to Germany**

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### **Abstract**

Focusing on student migration from Bulgaria to Germany, this article examines what types of social capital are accumulated, transformed and implemented through migration, who profits from the investment, and how. The empirical work consists of 60 narrative biographical interviews with migrants and returnees to Bulgaria. The research reveals that the accumulation and investment of social capital takes place throughout the migratory trajectory—starting well before leaving—and is embedded in a transnational social space. Transnational networks exist as family, peer and professional networks, and all of them have a specific meaning for the migrants. Family networks are naturally present; they provide bonding social capital and thus have a stabilizing function for the individual's identity. Professional networks have a strongly bridging function, helping the young migrants to manage status transitions. After return the transnational social capital acquired during the migratory stay helps returnees to re-integrate and find their way into the Bulgarian labour market. It also encourages them to pursue activities which are meaningful for civil society development, or for innovative (social) entrepreneurship. Thus, transnational social capital helps migrants to align their biographical development to the future, considering the post-transformative environment of Bulgaria, thereby helping to manage transformative changes and supporting societal modernization processes.

### **Keywords**

Bulgaria; Germany; social capital; student migration; return migration; transnational approach

### **Issue**

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### **1. Introduction**

Taking a comparative perspective on student migration from Bulgaria to Germany, this article addresses the questions of why, and under what circumstances, international students return home after having graduated abroad, given the fact that they have studied in a highly developed country and return to a transition country with lower wage standards and fewer economic opportunities. Through the lens of neoclassical economic approaches (e.g., Harris & Todaro, 1970; Sjaastad, 1962), which see wage gaps as a major trigger for migration, return migration from Germany to Bulgaria would appear as a movement against economic rationality. After

the end of the Cold War, Bulgaria underwent massive economic and political changes, which led to escalating unemployment numbers, poverty, and large-scale emigration. The integration of Bulgaria into the European Union in 2007 increased emigration to other EU countries. Between 2007 and 2017, the Bulgarian Statistical Office documented 192,132 departures of Bulgarians, but only 66,541 returning Bulgarian citizens, amounting to a migratory loss of 125,591 people (Republic of Bulgaria National Statistical Institute, 2018).

Due to the selectivity of emigration flows in terms of age and skill levels, emigration leads to accelerated demographic ageing and to a lack of skilled labour force and thus has negative consequences for economic pros-

perity and competitiveness. In this respect, the Bulgarian situation is comparable to other post-socialist transition countries (e.g., Lang, Glorius, Nadler, & Kovács, 2016, p. 5). Regarding the age and skill selectivity of migration, emigration for educational purposes is of specific importance for Bulgaria, as studying abroad frequently constitutes a pathway into the host country's labour market and thus into long-term or permanent emigration (Dreher & Poutvaara, 2011; Pratsinakis, Hatziprokopiou, Grammatikas, & Labrianidis, 2017). Students returning from abroad, on the other hand, are seen as an important element for the economic and social development of a country, as they can re-invest their skills and knowledge which they acquired while studying abroad (Ghimire & Maharjan, 2015; le Bail & Shen, 2008).

While taking the return-development nexus of migration as the overarching research perspective, this article examines the mechanisms of how social capital is acquired, transformed and implemented throughout the migration trajectory. It specifically focuses on the role of strong and weak ties, a specification of social capital introduced by Granovetter (1973) and further elaborated by Putnam (2000). The main argument of the article is that the accumulation and investment of social capital takes place throughout the whole migratory trajectory, starting well before leaving, and is strongly embedded in a transnational social space which structures migration decisions, trajectories and the evaluation of migratory steps. The various types of social capital characterized by strong and weak ties not only support the practical steps of migration and integration, but also serve as an emotional anchor for migrants facing biographical uncertainty.

The findings are based on a three-year research project, which entailed the collection of 60 narrative biographical interviews with educational migrants and returnees to Bulgaria, expert interviews and document analysis. The empirical part of this article follows the migrants' trajectories—from Bulgaria to Germany, during the migratory stay, during the return process and after return. By examining the impact of social capital throughout the migration trajectory, the article connects to the scope of this thematic issue to theorise the role of migration with respect to social capital accumulation and transfer.

The article is organized in five sections. Following the introduction, I will discuss the main conceptual approaches used for this research and give an overview of related research. Section 3 will explain the methodology of the research, and Section 4 will present selected results focusing on the topic of social capital. In the concluding section, I will wrap up the results and discuss them in the light of social capital theory.

## 2. The Role of Social Capital in Migration and Return

### 2.1. Social Capital and Means of Transfer

Following the typology by Bourdieu (1986), capital can be differentiated into economic, cultural and social capital.

All three forms of capital are relevant for migratory processes. Economic needs can initiate migration and economic capital become accumulated during the migratory stay and reinvested after return. Cultural capital, in terms of knowledge and skills, helps to prepare a migratory stay, for example if specific language skills are necessary to gain access to a host country's labour market. Focusing on student migration, cultural capital is enhanced and accumulated during the migratory stay and can be used as a resource when entering the labour market back home or abroad. Social capital can be characterized as mutual support based on shared belonging to a specific social group, created by family ties, geographical ties, friendship or shared biographies. It is provided in the form of information, assistance or material support with the expectation that the investment will pay off in the future (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 21).

The accumulation and transfer of social capital depends not only on who is involved in the transfer process but also on the fabric of social ties. Granovetter (1973, p. 1361) defines the strength of social ties in interpersonal relationships in terms of "the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services." While strong ties are often attached to the same milieu, weak ties develop between different milieus. Therefore, weak ties can have a bridging function between social milieus and are thus relevant for the diffusion of information and innovation (Granovetter, 1973, pp. 1363–1364). In a slightly different taxonomy, Putnam (2000) defines the "bridging" and "bonding" functions of social capital. While he makes the same distinction as Granovetter regarding the characteristics of bridging social capital as "outward looking and encompass[ing] people across diverse social cleavages" and bonding social capital as "inward looking" and "reinforc[ing] exclusive identities" (Putnam, 2000, p. 22), he highlights the stabilizing function of bonding social capital, defining it for example as friends who can be relied upon even in situations of crisis.

In the research on return migration, the question how the various forms of migrant capital (economic, cultural, social) can be transferred and re-invested in the home country is of paramount importance. The seminal work of Cerase (1974) on returning labour emigrants in Italy suggests that not all returnees are able or willing to contribute to the home country's development. While some used their capital mainly for individual consumerism (return of success, return of retirement) and others returned because their migratory project had failed, some returnees were willing and able to significantly contribute to the home country's development (return of innovation; Cerase, 1974). Studies on capital transfer in the context of migration stress the stimulating effects of return migration in terms of economic development and the introduction of innovative knowledge, and they highlight the impact of social capital in this process. Both Wolfeil (2013) and Klein-Hitpaß (2016) in their studies on return migration to Poland saw

the high impact of intercultural knowledge and intercultural social contacts on successful placement in the labour market. Also, Klein-Hitpaß (2016) found mutual trust to be crucial for the successful entrepreneurial activities of returnees. Those elements were embedded in the transnational social field which served as a major field of reference for the migrants and which was developed and maintained throughout the migratory trajectory.

## 2.2. Transnationalism and Social Capital

The application of Bourdieu's social capital theory to migration studies entails a number of conceptual and methodological challenges. Even though Bourdieu's notion of "social field" can be interpreted in social rather than in geographical terms (Nowicka, 2015, p. 18), the social capital approach at least implicitly relates to only one single national context. The introduction of transnational theory since the 1990s (e.g., Glick Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992) and the adoption of transnational social spaces as major reference frames for migrants (e.g., Faist, 2000; Pries, 1999) challenged the implementation of the social capital approach. Scholars had to find ways to adapt the approach to a social field that spans more than one national category, and thus blurs power relations which are conceptualized within one national framework. Several pieces of research tackled those challenges and thus were able to show the potential of the social capital approach in transnational migration studies. Kelly and Lusi (2006) applied Bourdieu's notion of the habitus as a heuristic framework for integrating the various dimensions of transmigrants' lives. They showed that, for example, the low-status work of Filipino migrants in Toronto was "converted into substantial cultural and social capital back in the Philippines" (Kelly & Lusi, 2006, p. 844), and also the habitus of being a transnational migrant helped raise the social status back home. Regarding the definition of space in Bourdieu's concept, they suggested paying less attention to absolute, physical spaces than to social spaces (Kelly & Lusi, 2006, p. 845).

A further strand of research which applies the social capital terminology to the field of transnational migration studies is research on social remittances. While remittances are generally defined as financial means that are transferred home in the context of migration, the term "social remittances" mirrors Bourdieu's capital terminology, stating that contributions from migration can also be observed in the cultural and social sphere. Following Levitt (1998, p. 927), social remittances are "the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving to sending country communities." The social remittances approach assumes that migrants reflect new structures they are confronted with during migration on the basis of their own, imported reference scheme. As a result of this reflection, they either maintain or change their routines, or develop some kind of creolized routine (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011).

The phenomenon has already been widely described in migration research even before the introduction of the term "social remittances," for example describing the development of "cultures of migration" or "migration-driven forms of cultural change" (de Haas, 2010; Grabowska, Garapich, Jazwinska, & Radziwinowicz, 2017). Grabowska et al. (2017, pp. 15–16) stress the long history of social remittances in the context of Polish migration, for example changes in dressing habits, gender relations, career aspirations and changes of personal attitudes, norms and values. Research applying the concept of social remittances has highlighted the potentials of this form of capital transfer for home communities. As remigrants introduce non-formal innovative knowledge and practices in their society of origin, they can become "agents of change" and fuel the cohesion of social norms and values (Grabowska et al., 2017, p. 3).

In a comparative perspective, both Bourdieu's (1986) social capital approach and Levitt's (1998) social remittances approach show a number of similarities, but also differences. Both concepts apply an expanded definition of "capital" which also integrates non-monetary terms of exchange. Both provide a differentiated typology considering strong and weak ties, bonding and bridging social capital, or deep and shallow social remittances. However, there are major differences in the explanatory focus and in the geographical perspective of the two approaches. While the social capital theory aims to explain mechanisms for establishing and maintaining power hierarchies, the social remittances approach focuses on the diffusion of ideas and innovation. In Bourdieu's reading, the geographical focus does not seem fixed but implicitly relates to only one single national context, while social remittances look beyond the borders of a nation state. However, the term "remittances" ("paying back") implicitly suggests a unidirectional diffusion process from destination to home country (society), even though research literature also describes the reverse transfer of cultural norms or practices (e.g., Grabowska & Garapich, 2016; Grabowska et al., 2017).

For both concepts, the explanatory potential can be enhanced when designing them for a transnational research frame. This implies a definition of social capital which is detached from national boundaries, but which is sensitive towards the reproduction of power hierarchies in home and destination country and how migrants reflect and transform them. Transnational social capital thus can be understood as social capital which is accumulated and utilized within a transnational social space, which connects migrants with residents in home and destination country. It consists of strong and weak social ties and manifold processes of mutual support. Transnational migrants use transnational social capital at a varying degree throughout the migratory trajectory, so that bridging and bonding functions of social capital carriers might change or overlap. Notwithstanding that both the social capital approach and the social remittances approach are fruitful for the empirical case developed in this article,

the analysis will mainly focus on the accumulation, implementation and transformation of social capital during the migratory trajectory. A deeper exploration of social innovation and its diffusion in the context of return migration to Bulgaria will be carried out in other publications on this project.

### 3. Data Collection and Research Methodology

The data used for this article stems from a research project on Bulgarian migrants who studied abroad—focusing on Germany as a destination country—and then either remained in the host country or returned to Bulgaria. In total, 60 narrative, biographical interviews with migrants were carried out in 2016 and 2017, of whom 30 had returned to Bulgaria (coded as BUL1-BUL30) at the time of the interview, and 30 had remained in Germany (coded as DEU1-DEU30). Furthermore, the data contains eight expert interviews (coded as E1-E8) with stakeholders in the field of student migration, return, and Bulgarian–German relations. The migrant interviews were carried out based on guidelines which focused on: 1) the motives for studying abroad, 2) daily life abroad, 3) the return or stay decision after graduation, 4) life after the return/stay decision was implemented, and 5) a provisional appraisal of the migration biography. The guidelines gave enough room for the individual narration of experiences, emotions and reflections, but also ensured that the qualitative data could be analysed within a comparative framework.

Data collection followed a snowball strategy. In Bulgaria, personal network contacts of the interviewer, migrant associations and transnational institutions were starting points for snowball sampling; interviews were carried out—following the snowball—in the cities of Sofia, Plovdiv and Weliko Tarnovo. In Germany, initial contacts to Bulgarian graduates were developed via student and alumni associations. Interviews

were conducted—again following the snowball—in the cities of Berlin, Leipzig, Chemnitz, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Darmstadt, Munich and Stuttgart. The snowball sampling aimed to achieve an even gender split and a good variety regarding age groups, time of migration, family situation and studied subjects (see Table 1). However, the sample cannot be regarded as representative in a quantitative sense. Interviews were mostly carried out in Bulgarian (with some in English and German) and later transcribed and translated into German.

The analysis of the narrative interviews follows the analytical methodology of Schütze (1983) and is methodologically based on the concept of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), according to which people are regarded as goal-oriented agents whose actions are influenced by their integration into a given social context. A reconstructive analysis of biographical actions aims to understand the self-interpretations of respondents in terms of biographical stages, action orientations and decisions. Therefore, the reason for an action is less decisive for the analysis than the actual practices and the goals of an action. With regard to the transnational research field, it is assumed that in the course of a transnational biography, orientations emerge and are transformed through new experiences and the reflection of those experiences. Sociology of knowledge assumes that those orientations are partly unwittingly present. Therefore, they are denoted as “a-theoretical knowledge,” because we use them in our daily practices and routines without explicating them (Nohl, 2006, p. 10).

The interview transcripts were analysed in two directions: along the individual cases, and along the topics detected across the whole dataset. First, the transcripts were sequenced and paraphrased, in order to reveal the main storylines and meta-topics of each interview. On the basis of the sequencing, an extended case description was prepared, which delineated and interpreted the biographical passages, individual goals and stages of de-

**Table 1.** Characterization of the interviewed migrants.

	Migrants in Germany (DEU)	Returnees in Bulgaria (BUL)
<b>Number of interviews</b>	30	30
<b>Gender</b>	11 male, 19 female	13 male, 17 female
<b>Age Groups</b>	21–29 years: 14 30–39 years: 15 40–49 years: 1	21–29 years: 14 30–39 years: 12 40–49 years: 4
<b>Emigration to Germany</b>	before 2007: 14 2007 until 2013: 14 since 2014: 2	before 2007: 17 2007 until 2013: 13 since 2014: 0
<b>Occupation</b>	Entrepreneur: 5 Public Services: 4 Employee: 5 Not working: 6	Entrepreneur: 4 Public Services: 5 Employee in German Company: 6 Employee in Transnational Company: 13 Unemployed: 2



velopment from the perspective of the interviewees. The second stage of analysis entailed a systematic coding of all transcripts to prepare for the thematic analyses across the whole dataset. For this article, I use the thematic cross-analysis to highlight specific topics of the analysis—other papers from this project elaborate the biographical viewpoint and put biographical case studies to the fore.

#### 4. Results

In the presentation of results, I will follow the migratory trajectories of the interviewees in order to reveal what kind of social capital is used, how, and for what purpose. First, I will show how social capital is implemented to facilitate the migratory process (Section 4.1). Then I will highlight the differences in form and function between social capital which is bound to the home country, and social capital which is acquired abroad (Section 4.2). The last subsection accompanies the process of return migration and analyses what forms of social capital are used during the return process (Section 4.3).

##### 4.1. Social Capital as Facilitator of Student Migration

The first finding refers to the question of what kind of social capital facilitates the educational migration and when, how and where it is compiled. Many interviewees graduated from language high schools in Bulgaria: schools that are specialized in teaching one foreign language intensively. Those schools represent a transnational environment which structures and fuels the emigration decision in manifold ways: There is a specific language curriculum, leading to an internationally acknowledged language certificate. Most of the teaching is done in the foreign language, and there is original teaching material from the respective country. The language high schools organize field trips to the relevant country, as well as language competitions and individual consultations regarding the further educational career abroad. The students of the language high schools form a specific social group with a shared habitus. Regarding the emigration decision after high-school graduation, peers and siblings serve as role models for migration, and thus share experiences and provide support: “As I said, I was in this German language high school in Sofia, and all of my friends, or nearly all, 98%, are German-speaking people, who also studied in Germany” (DEU 12, lines 168–170).

Social capital directly facilitated and sometimes even triggered and directed the migratory process of those high school graduates. Several interviewees stress the collective emigration decision of the peer group, based on a collective action orientation. For example, interviewee BUL9 recalls her decision to move to the German city of Muenster in 1996 as follows:

BUL9: Together with my schoolmates, who were one year older, I decided rather early to study in Germany. And that’s what happened....About fifteen of us went.

I: Why did you choose Muenster?

BUL9: There were two reasons. First, the university has a good reputation, and second I knew people there. They could give me information on the spot. In 1996, the situation was different. It was not that easy to study abroad. (BUL9, lines 8–22)

Others explicitly stated that their emigration was predetermined by their parents, who supported the educational migration from the beginning of the educational career. For example, DEU10, who graduated from a German high school in Sofia, recalls:

I was in a German language class, where you do the German high school exam, with the clear goal to study in Germany. This was partly the wish of my parents. They have had a fascination for Germany since the 1980s, I don’t know why. They love Germany—rationally, irrationally, a nice mixture of both. So for me, this was a choice which I never doubted, it was just like this after eighth or ninth grade: Okay, now you are in German high school, and later you will study in Germany, and then you will probably stay there and get a job. (DEU10, lines 2–11)

We can also see how different forms and functions of social capital are invested during the migratory project, with weak ties and bridging social capital becoming especially relevant for a successful transition from high school in Bulgaria to higher education in Germany. Many interviewees relied on contact persons regarding the choice of a German university and the organisation of the stay. Those contact persons were mostly “friends of friends,” so there was no close relationship before, and interviewees approached them intentionally to receive advice and assistance. This is reflected by DEU8, who moved to the city of Chemnitz in 2011 and initially relied on the assistance of a contact person within her transnational social network:

It was three months before high school graduation, I think. I talked to a friend of my mum who has lived here in Chemnitz for fifteen years, I think. She asked me what my plans are for the future, and I told her that I want to study. And then she suggested that I come here. (DEU8, lines 9–12)

During the first months, DEU8 lived with the friend of her mother and was helped with all initial steps which were necessary to start studying at the University of Chemnitz. Later, she moved into a student dormitory. Thus, the contact person served as a weak tie, in Granovetter’s (1973) terminology, and provided bridging social capital, following Putnam (2000).

Bonding social capital, on the other hand, is produced, implemented and consumed during the migratory stay within the network of peers at the migratory

destination. Especially Bulgarian peers play an important role. Almost all interviewees immediately searched for Bulgarian peers when they arrived at their destination in Germany, or the contact was already established prior to arrival. The Bulgarian “buddy” not only alleviated the first steps into the new environment, but also served as an emotional anchor. Hanging out together, having someone to communicate with in Bulgarian and cooking Bulgarian dishes helped our interviewees to overcome homesickness and depression, which frequently overwhelmed them during the first year abroad:

I recall the beginning as a dark period. Later we talked about it. In the very moment when it happens, you don’t think about it. You don’t think “Oh, it is so hard, I want to be back home.” But if I look back now, I have to say that the whole first year was very depressing for me. (DEU11, lines 81–84)

There is such a bitter memory of the first months, where you think, you are a stranger, you speak the language, but not very well, so people are making fun of you. And you sleep somewhere in a hostel and things like that. (DEU14, lines 352–354)

Interviewee BUL12, who studied communication sciences at the University of Hohenheim/Stuttgart, recalls her desperation at the beginning, after having arrived “alone with a big suitcase” at Stuttgart central station:

In Germany, the pressure to perform was huge. I was alone among one hundred German students! The difference between German and Bulgarian students is tremendous, notably those German students who study communication sciences. They are very ambitious, very motivated. They go to any lengths to reach their goal. (BUL12, lines 101–103)

As she felt inferior to her fellow students, she could not make friends with anybody from her class. She felt very lonely during the whole first semester. Then she made friends with a Spanish ERASMUS student in her dormitory, who comforted her, as she recalls:

We shared the flat for one year. She helped me so much. She was such a cheerful person; she helped me to overcome the first shock. We went out together, we laughed a lot, and she kept telling me that everything would work out. (BUL12, lines 114–119)

After the first semester, she met a Bulgarian student in her university town, Stuttgart, and they became friends:

Over time we became close friends. He supported me a lot. We travelled together, we went out together. I didn’t have the feeling of loneliness anymore. During the first term I was so stressed. I always started crying during the Skype calls with my parents, because

I wanted to get back home. (BUL12, lines 122–125)

According to our interviewees, the Bulgarian “buddy system” is not just a purely utilitarian activity, but also stems from the implicit desire for community with biographical peers. Quite often, there is one key individual per study location who serves as the main hub of the network and is pushing activities such as the joint celebration of Bulgarian holidays or “Balkan parties.” Those activities help to deepen the attachment to the in-group, and also provide opportunities to make the Bulgarian culture more visible in Germany. Thus, these activities can also be described as a cultural capital transfer from Bulgaria to Germany:

I frequently organized parties, not for profit, but just so the Bulgarians can get in contact with each other....To bring this atmosphere from Bulgaria over here. Because, in Germany, I never liked the clubs. The bars are not that nice or appealing to us. And also the atmosphere is just not there, the people are just a little bit more introverted. (DEU6, lines 86–103)

Over time, those informal social networks of friends can transform into institutionalized structures, such as Bulgarian study associations with formalized status positions and membership fees. For example, DEU15, located in Berlin, recalls his activities for Bulgarian students, starting from a loose network until the formation of a student association, as follows:

During the third semester, some friends and I saw the necessity—I wouldn’t call it a gap, but the need for a student association here in Berlin. We learned that there used to be one, but it became inactive in 2013. We contacted the former founders and they helped us with the registration, they gave us a little know-how, and told us how we could develop our work....We also tried to facilitate the integration process for the newcomers: We told them, okay, these were the faults that we used to make, please don’t make these mistakes! So this was the know-how transfer from the older Bulgarian students, the more experienced students, to the new ones. I think we organized thirty events this year. (DEU15, lines 49–58, 120–128)

Regarding the provisional status of student life and the fluidity of their personal presence in a specific geographical location, institutionalization processes as described in this example can support the stability of a social network consisting of weak ties in the light of individual and generational changes. The formalisation of the network helps to uphold symbolic or practical ties between its members, an aspect which is not relevant for kinship-based networks such as family networks.

#### 4.2. *The Significance of Transnational Social Capital Accumulation for Future Decisions*

In this section, I will take a closer look at different forms and functions of transnational social capital, and how it enables the student migrants to manoeuvre in a transnational social field, especially regarding future (migratory) decisions. Many of the young Bulgarians who move to Germany have no concrete plans about whether they will return after graduation or stay in the destination country. Some make their decision dependent on the question of whether they succeed in establishing themselves in the German labour market, or not. Against this background, the return for many appears as a “lifeline,” an option that can always be chosen. A well-known Bulgarian proverb—“at home, it’s also the walls, that help”—serves as an allegory for a society where traditional kinship-based social networks play an important role. The young migrants are aware of the reliability of these strong ties, and those who have returned also report the immediate relief those networks bring to their personal lives, as BUL1 explains below:

If you want to have more freedom, more flexibility, more free time, I think, you can have this easier here in Bulgaria [laughs]. In Germany, it would have been very, very hard. I always imagined life in Germany where I have a job, really the same job for years, so that I am somehow more fixed. And here, I see it is all more flexible, I don’t know how....We have a proverb in Bulgaria, which is “at home, it’s also the walls, that help.”...I think you can also translate this in very practical terms. When I am in Germany, I have to take care of everything myself, all the time—also here, but here you have your family, you have support. Sometimes also the financial support, well, not directly the financial, but you also have your parents’ apartment, you can afford to, to have more...to really allow yourself more free time. (BUL1, lines 57–77)

This citation suggests that strong ties and bonding social capital are reliable in numerous practical terms and thus increase the resilience and emotional stability of individuals.

However, studying abroad and the biographical uncertainty arising from the transition from studies to the labour market have also made many respondents aware of the need to actively accumulate social capital. In particular, contacts with the professional world must be acquired. Given that most of our interviewees had not decided where to start a professional career after graduation in Germany, it was necessary for them to establish links with relevant labour market actors in Germany and Bulgaria. Many of our interviewees thus completed internships in companies in Bulgaria or spent an ERASMUS exchange semester in Bulgaria as part of their studies abroad. Through this, they could develop first contacts with Bulgarian labour market actors, which were impor-

tant if they wanted to return after graduation. At the same time, the development of professional contacts in both countries was perceived as crucial for an international career, and also as an additional asset for a successful return:

And, the most important thing during studies is that you make as many contacts as possible, in various sectors, such as with economists, managers, or business owners, so that you can later cooperate. This means that you do not completely abandon Germany. (DEU6, lines 547–560)

Another aspect of social capital is intercultural competence, which can be gained during a migratory stay, as DEU15 argues. Therefore, he recommends that young people do at least one semester abroad in order to:

Get to know new cultures, because this is really very, very important and it will also definitely be a crucial competence in Bulgaria, to deal with people from different cultural backgrounds. I think this already is an essential prerequisite for economic life. (DEU15, lines 338–351)

And in fact, quite a large proportion of returnees are employed in international companies in Bulgaria. Also among the “remainers,” some developed transnational business opportunities between Germany and Bulgaria, actively using their transnational social capital as a bridge.

Summing up this section, it becomes clear that transnational social capital is highly relevant for the preparation of the next step in the migratory trajectory and the next stage of life course. The transnational character of social capital is partly a by-product of the migration experience, but partly it is intentionally acquired. Both the bridging and the bonding social capital are relevant at this stage, albeit for different purposes. As Putnam (2000) formulated it, bonding social capital is good for “getting by” and bridging is crucial for “getting ahead.”

#### 4.3. *Paying Back: Transnational Social Capital Transfer*

My next step is to examine activities involved in transnational social capital transfer in the context of return. I will also look at how social capital might be transformed over time. The first observation is that, like in the beginning of the migratory trajectory, social capital is implemented to facilitate return migration and reintegration back home. This means that our interviewees rely on transnational social capital for getting the information necessary to prepare for a smooth return. While during emigration, educational choices structured the decision-making process, now occupational opportunities move to the fore. The returnees need information about the structure of the Bulgarian labour market, job vacancies and possible

wage levels. While there are also individual actors who provide this kind of information, there are influential institutional actors who facilitate return and labour market integration and thus institutionalize social capital and social networks.

One renowned actor in the field of institutionalized transnational social capital in Bulgaria is the NGO Tuk-Tam. Tuk-Tam literally means “here and there” and thus underlines the transnational scope of its work. Tuk-Tam was originally founded by a group of returnees from abroad who reflected on their own difficulties upon return and wanted to support their peers:

Yeah, and actually it started in 2008, the Tuk-Tam NGO, because we, our founders—seven of them—all came back from the States or from England, and they didn’t have their social environment anymore, so they started with these networking events. (E4/5, 139–141)

Today, Tuk-Tam facilitates the whole transnational mobility chain, supporting the preparation of going abroad, the continuation of contacts and networks during the stay abroad, and the facilitation of return. For example, there are regular meetings for students intending to go abroad with returnees who share their experiences. In order to support the connections to Bulgaria during the migratory stay, Tuk-Tam organizes social innovation challenges. Bulgarians abroad can compete with their ideas for social projects in areas such as health, education or civil society development. The winners are supported in the implementation of their idea. Thus, also Bulgarians abroad are encouraged to bring social innovation to Bulgaria. Furthermore, the activities are meant to strengthen their emotional ties to Bulgaria (and thus bonding social capital). The last step in this transnational circuit is the facilitation of return. The NGO organizes career fairs in the major Bulgarian student locations abroad, where Bulgarian migrants can meet recruiters from Bulgaria and learn about job offers and career opportunities. Upon return, there are social events which support returnees to smoothly re-integrate back home, and there are also career fairs to directly meet with the employers.

Regarding this portfolio of activities, it becomes clear that the way social capital is returned and re-implemented is not solely concentrated on individual career development or material improvement, but also has a strong societal component. As a number of our expert interviewees put it, civic engagement can be a way to create meaning in one’s life beyond materialistic goals. And given that the low wage level in Bulgaria will probably not trigger return from a Western European country such as Germany for merely economic reasons, post-materialistic goals, connected with entrepreneurial spirit, can become an important incentive for return, as expert E6 argues:

Because, if all those kids who stay abroad right now, if they know that there are comparable settings for their societal development back home....I think this can be one reason, one more motive to return. (E6, 166–169)

An important prerequisite for the development of return motivations on the basis of a post-materialistic life concept is reflexivity. Reflexivity frequently develops in the context of transnational livelihoods (Saar, 2019; Scheibelhofer, 2009). The opportunity to live in different places across the world raises the awareness of one’s individual assets in life. In fact, many of our interviewees addressed their privileged educational experiences from a relational perspective. For some of them, experiences during migration changed their mind-set regarding what could be meaningful in their future life. For example, BUL11, who returned to implement development projects in poor neighbourhoods in Sofia, developed her remigration plans during a business trip to Indonesia, where she realized the extreme poverty in the population and compared it to her own, privileged way of life in Germany. The intention to develop a meaningful occupation developed in the context of her transnational experiences and finally resulted in her return decision. During the interview, she stresses the fact that social engagement has a much stronger impact in a country like Bulgaria with a less developed civil society than in a well-ordered country such as Germany:

The feeling that I can develop something to improve life here is very good for me. I have a meaningful life here. In Germany, everything is so well organized that I wouldn’t even want to change anything. (BUL11, lines 158–165)

The representatives of the NGO Tuk-Tam share this impression. Also for them, the development of social business opportunities is an important motivation for return. In their opinion, a social or entrepreneurial innovation is easier to develop and implement in Bulgaria than in more developed countries. In their view, this fact could explicitly motivate the return of people with entrepreneurial spirit and a big interest in their own personal development.

Well, there is a lot of work to do here in Bulgaria to make it better. And that’s why people who have studied somewhere and see that, “oh, okay, we don’t have this yet here in Bulgaria,” and they come back and make it....Maybe it’s my stereotype that people who, who want to grow, they are more motivated to come back here. (E4/5, 326–328, 593–594)

As it turns out, activities of transnational social capital transfer are not solely focused on the facilitation of return and thus on individual benefits, but also have a societal component. The activities described above fit well into the concept of social remittances and appear more

clearly when regarded from a transnational research perspective. We saw changes of norms and values, a high self-reflexivity and amounts of social capital which are re-invested in a way that means social innovation can spread in the place of return. From the sending countries' perspective, this might be one of the most promising results from our research.

## 5. Conclusion

The scope of this article was to reveal how social capital is utilized among transnational migrants and the home and host societies. Taking the example of Bulgarian student migrants in Germany and after their return, this article examined what types of social capital were accumulated, transformed and implemented throughout the migratory trajectory, who profited from the investment, and how.

The research revealed that the accumulation and investment of social capital takes place throughout the migratory trajectory and is strongly embedded in a transnational framework. Social capital accumulation already starts before departure, via institutional or personal connections to Germany, and peers in Bulgaria and in Germany who serve as role models and provide advice and practical help.

The research showed that transnational social capital in the context of student migration is embedded in kinship networks, peer networks and institutionalized networks. All of these serve specific purposes during the migration trajectory. Kinship networks represent strong ties, are "naturally" present and serve as bonding social capital and as a "backup" in the context of biographical uncertainty, which appears in the transition from studies to working life, and during migration (Saar, 2019; Scheibelhofer, 2009). They are specifically influential in return decisions, of which many appeared as spontaneous and poorly prepared. Peer networks, notably networks of former classmates, were found to serve varying purposes during the migration trajectory. Networks of former classmates played a strong role for defining a shared collective identity, and they represented strong emotional attachments among the migrants. While those functions, which represent bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000), were specifically relevant for the emigration decision and the first year abroad, bridging functions of peer networks gained importance during the migratory stay and after return. Also, peer networks were an important source for establishing weak ties to further stakeholders (Granovetter, 1973). Those weak ties, either to individuals or to institutionalized networks, develop throughout the migratory trajectory, based on intentional practices of social capital accumulation. Institutional networks have a strongly bridging function, which help the young migrants to overcome practical obstacles and uncertainty during the various steps in their migration trajectory and status changes. As they are not "naturally" given, these networks need intentional in-

vestment, which, as I showed, cannot solely rely on individual motivations, but which are transformed into an institutional structure, such as study associations with paid membership and elected chairs.

The transnational social capital acquired during the migratory stay is implemented in the home country in manifold ways. Within institutionalized networks, it helps returnees to re-integrate and find their way into the Bulgarian labour market. But the social capital investment reaches out beyond those utilitarian goals and encourages investment in activities which are meaningful for civil society development, or for innovative (social) entrepreneurship. The process of giving meaning to civic engagement or social entrepreneurship can be classified as symbolic capital transfer and is connected to a reinterpretation of experiences in the context of transnational migration and the development of post-materialist goals in life (Saar, 2019; Scheibelhofer, 2009). The research showed that transnational social capital is not only implemented to support mobility and integration processes, but that it is also intentionally invested in the home country aiming to support processes of social cohesion. The research showed that the migratory stay enhanced reflexivity among the migrants about social injustice and their own positionality, which gave them a motivation for social engagement back home. This was enforced by the increasing importance of post-materialistic goals and the opportunities of new business options in the field of social entrepreneurship. Thus, return migrants created career opportunities which are meaningful for them and helped them to overcome biographical uncertainties connected to their mobile biography and the ongoing transition of their home country. In this context, social capital helps to manage transformative changes and supports societal modernization processes (Grabowska et al., 2017).

The findings highlighted the importance of a transnational research perspective in migration research and revealed how various forms of social capital are acquired, transformed and implemented throughout a transnational migration trajectory. From a longitudinal perspective, it would be interesting to continue to follow the life course of our interviewees, assuming that the transnational social capital which they acquired will keep its relevance and will trigger further transnational mobilities, or practices. A further follow-up from this research could address how power hierarchies embedded in migration biographies transform over time, related to changing perceptions of migration and its value in the home society.

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## Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

## **Second Generation and Migrant Capital in the Transnational Space: The Case of Young Kurds in France**

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### **Abstract**

Transnational ties, networks, and mobilities can constitute a social resource for diaspora communities. Resources available as a result of the migration process or transnational ties can potentially become capitalised by diaspora members. Yet, diaspora members cannot automatically capitalise on all transnational networks and ties, and only resources that are mobilisable within particular transnational networks constitute “migrant capital” (Anthias, 2007; Ryan, 2011). Migrants’ children have grown up in “transnational social space,” in a social setting that is embedded with multiple sets of interconnected networks of social relationships, memberships, identities, and mobilities of cross-border character (Levitt, 2009). Little is known on whether such transnational networks function as a mobilisable social resource, i.e., migrant capital, for the second generation. This study focuses on the transnational ties, practices, and mobilities of second-generation Kurds in France and examines whether those constitute a mobilisable resource for them. It specifically asks if second-generation members intent to or have capitalised on such resources in the transnational social space. The study sheds light on the workings of transnational resources in the lives of the second generation and asks about the extent to which they can be considered migrant capital. The analysis draws from a qualitative dataset such as interviews and observations collected with second-generation Kurds in France.

### **Keywords**

diaspora; France; Kurdish; migrant capital; second generation; transnationalism

### **Issue**

This article is part of the issue “Social Inclusion beyond Borders: Utilization of Migrant Capital in Transnational and Diaspora Communities” edited by Sanna Saksela-Bergholm (University of Helsinki, Finland), Mari Toivanen (University of Helsinki, Finland) and Östen Wahlbeck (University of Helsinki, Finland).

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### **1. Introduction**

Focusing on migrants’ local and ethnic social networks and ties, studies have shown how they can function as a resource bearing an impact on migrants’ adaptation and their upward or downward social mobility within the new host societies (Nannestad, Svendsen, & Svendsen, 2008). Since the 1990s, transnational theorization has offered new perspectives on how migrants’ networks and activities span both the receiving and sending country contexts. Scholars have examined how diaspora communities maintain and create social ties, networks, or even institutions that are of a transnational character (Vertovec, 2009). It has also been suggested that—in addition to local ties and ethnic networks—transnational

ties, networks, and mobilities can be(come) a form of social resources for diaspora communities and their members (Faist, 2000a, 2000b; Ryan, Erel, & D’Angelo, 2015; Ryan, Sales, Tilki, & Siara, 2008). Members of diasporas can capitalise such resources derived from the transnational networks that are available to them as a result of their migration experience for economic, political, social, or other purposes. However, not all transnational networks and ties automatically constitute a social resource for migrants: It has been suggested that only networks that can be mobilised as a social resource within particular (transnational) networks ought to be considered to be a form of social capital (Anthias, 2007; Ryan, 2011; Wahlbeck, 2018). Such mobilisable and transferrable networks and ties that have come about as a result of migra-

tion processes is considered to constitute and referred to as “migrant capital” in this article (Erel & Ryan, 2019; Ryan et al., 2015).

Whereas most studies on social capital seems to have focused on the first generation of migrants, a growing body of research has also examined the significance of social networks and ties to the second generation. Such studies have particularly focused on what role ethnic networks play in the second generation’s “adaptation” and educational and professional achievements (Fernandez-Kelly, 2008; Shah, Dwyer, & Modood, 2010; Zhou & Bankston, 1994; Zhou & Xiong, 2005). The second generation’s transnational networks from the perspective of resources and social capital has drawn less attention. The second generation continues to foster transnational networks, ties, and connections to their parents’ homeland, although differently from their parents (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, & Holdaway, 2008; Levitt & Waters, 2002). Its members have grown up in a “transnational social space,” referring to a social setting that is embedded with multiple sets of interconnected networks of social relationships, memberships, identities, and mobilities of a transnational character (Levitt, 2009). Whether the transnational networks and ties—in addition to more localised forms of networks—constitute a form of social resource for the second-generation members and whether they manage to mobilise such resources and thereafter capitalise on them deserves more attention in scholarly debates. To what extent do transnational networks and ties represent a mobilisable social resource for the second generation?

This study examines the transnational ties, practices, and mobilities of second-generation Kurds in France. It asks: To what extent do they intent to or have mobilised and capitalised on social resources existing as a result of them having been raised in the transnational diaspora space? I shed light on the workings of (transnational) networks, ties, and mobilities in the lives of the second generation and discuss the extent to which they can be considered to be a form of migrant capital (Ryan et al., 2015). The analysis draws from a qualitative dataset (interviews, observation) collected with second-generation Kurds in France between 2016–2018. I will first present the relevant literature, the Kurdish case and the methods used, and then move on to discuss the central findings reported in this study. The article ends with a discussion and concluding remarks.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Social Networks in the Context of Migration

Migrants’ networks have long fascinated scholars, who have examined how migrants have managed to tap into the social resources that exist in their ethnic and non-ethnic networks for social advantage (Nannestad et al., 2008). Migrants’ networks and ties have been considered to be the key determinant in their migration patterns

and decisions and approached as social capital that either facilitates (or impedes) their social, political, or economic adaptation in the host society (Castles & Miller, 2003). Research on the second generation and social networks seems to have also focused on how “ethnic” networks relate to social capital, and how that in turn relates to social mobility, and thereafter to “adaptation” (or the perceived lack thereof). Such studies have examined community support networks and approached “ethnicity” as social capital, focusing also on resources and norms that affect second-generation members’ social mobility (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Shah et al., 2010; Zhou & Bankston, 1994; Zhou & Xiong, 2005). For instance, Shah (2007), drawing from Putnam’s theorisation (2000), shows how ethnic social relations influence the upward socio-economic mobility of second-generation Laotians in the United States.

Putnam (2000) distinguishes bonding ties (within a social group similar in terms of ethnicity, “race,” or religion) from bridging ties (between social groups that differ in these characteristics). However, Anthias (2007) finds this distinction problematic, as it denotes a fixed boundary between networks and ties that exist within and between different ethnic groups. Also, Ryan et al. (2015, p. 7) point out that instead of dividing networks according to the similarity or dissimilarity of the people involved, more attention needs to be paid “on the meaning as well as on the structure of networks”; in other words, on “specific relationships between and the relative social location of actors as well as the actual resources available and realisable within particular social networks.” They focus on intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic networks that are locally-based, national, or transnational in character, and examine how the social resources within those constitute a form of social capital for migrants. This is also a pertinent approach when examining second generation’s social networks and ties that are both intra and inter-ethnic, local and transnational.

Admittedly, there is an overlap between the first and second generation’s networks and even more so with the associative structures and organisational spaces of the diaspora community in which such networks become realised. At the same time, however, the second generation is more “integrated” and familiar with the structures of their parents’ host society (Crul & Mollenkopf, 2012). For instance, they can foster a variety of non-ethnic networks that are more locally bound in the host society (via student organizations, sports clubs, trade unions, political parties, etc.). Due to language skills and knowledge of the system, they can also have easier access to such networks compared to their parents. Therefore, instead of focusing on “ethnic networks” per se, I lean on Anthias’ (2007, p. 789) understanding of “ethnicity” as something that “denote[s] articulations and practices that relate to ethnic origin or ethnic bonds, whilst recognizing that such articulations do not necessarily derive purely from identificational or instrumental factors.” In other words, I focus on the second-generation’s networks that relate

to diasporic bonds and ties that have been developed as a result of their parents' migration and the transnational context they have been raised in.

## *2.2. Transnationalism, Second Generation and Migrant Capital*

It has been suggested that social capital ought not to be conflated with social resources in the context of migration (Anthias, 2007; Ryan et al., 2015). A Bourdieusian reading of social capital has been offered to remedy this (Cederberg, 2012), where social capital (networks, relationships) forms one of three forms of capital, including economic (material assets, income) and cultural (education, language, behaviour). One way a social resource can come to be defined as social capital is by its convertibility to other forms of resources or capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Applied to the context of migration, Anthias (2007) suggests that instead of taking social capital as a commodity that migrants possess, we ought to focus on the resources found in the ties and networks and treat them as social capital only if they are mobilisable and transferrable to other social resources in efforts to pursue social advantage (e.g., Wahlbeck, 2018). Also, the transferability does not mean to Anthias that social resources are capitalised only into economic goods and advantage, but that "transferability to education, power, authority, enablement and functionings" can have long-term social mobility effects, including in educational and professional choices and opportunities (Anthias, 2007, p. 792). In other words, not only can migrants use cultural capital (language, skills, educational qualifications) to mobilise social resources (following the Bourdieusian approach), social resources can also be used to gain more cultural capital (Anthias, 2007).

A growing body of literature has shown how migrants' transnational (in addition to local) ties and networks can be capitalised on and used by them for social mobility and advantage (Faist, 2000a, 2000b; Ryan, 2011; Ryan et al., 2015; Wahlbeck, 2018). The Bourdieusian approach to social capital has been criticized for its focus on national societies and falling short in analyses on migrants and how they are embedded in transnational social spaces (Erel, 2010; Wahlbeck, 2018). Similarly, Ryan et al. (2015) suggest that the previous theorization on social capital (Putnam, 2000) in the context of migration focuses on local associations, communities, and neighbourhoods without considering that migrants' networks often expand across national borders. Second-generation members are raised in a transnational social space, and often foster transnational networks and connections to their ancestral homeland, although to a lesser degree and in different ways to their parents (Kasinitz et al., 2008; Levitt, 2009; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). This means that they have grown up in a social setting that is embedded with multiple sets of interconnected networks of social relationships, membership, mobilities, practices, and identities of transnational char-

acter. To what extent, then, do transnational networks and ties represent a mobilisable social resource for the second generation?

As Faist notes (2000b, p. 13), migrants can use different types of capital in the transnational spaces they are embedded in "economic capital (for example, financial capital), human capital (for example, skills and know-how) and social capital (resources inherent in social and symbolic ties)." This also begs the question: To what extent are such social resources, realisable via transnational networks and ties, available for the second generation? Ryan et al. (2015) suggest that migrant capital consists of mobilisable social resources that are available to migrants as a result of the migration process. This article draws from this approach and understands migrant capital as mobilisable resources in form of social relations and ties in the transnational space. These can be used to accumulate more social capital or become converted to, for instance, cultural capital. I have chosen to use the term migrant capital even when talking about the second generation to refer to the transnational space that the second generation is embedded in as a result of their parents' migration. The term also alludes to the diasporic bonds that second-generation Kurds foster within that transnational space, and that have been capitalised on and hold the potential to be capitalised on in future.

## **3. The Kurdish Diaspora**

Two major developments have led to the resettlement of Kurds in diaspora communities around the globe in the 20th century. The first one has been traced back to the economic boom witnessed by Western Europe since the 1960s that was followed by labour migration, and the second to the unstable political situation in the Kurdistan region that led to forced migration. Armed conflicts between the Kurdish factions and the state that occasionally involved international forces were a frequent characteristic of the interethnic relations in Iraq (1961 to 2003), Iran (1967 to 1968 and 1979 to today), and Turkey (1984 to the present; Hassanpour & Mojab, 2005, p. 218). In the 1980s, there was an increase in the number of Kurds migrating from Turkey to Western Europe due to the violent conflict between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Turkish state. Also, the Turkish state's so-called "forced urbanisation" programmes implemented in eastern Turkey destroyed thousands of Kurdish villages and consequently led to forced displacement.

The Kurdish community in France is among the largest in Europe, after Germany. The 1960s witnessed a small-scale Kurdish labour migration to France, the 1970s the migration of Kurdish families to France, which then increasingly turned into migration of asylum-seekers in the 1980s. The violent conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdish movement in the 1980s was one of the main migration motivations (Hassanpour & Mojab, 2005) and has been considered as one of the reasons for the high level of politicization of the Kurdish com-



munity in France (Khayati, 2008). The pro-PKK associations have a strong standing in France, although we are witnessing the emergence of second-generation associations that are less political in nature (Karagöz, 2017). The Kurdish population is estimated at between 230,000 and 250,000 of which approximately 80% originated from Turkey. Smaller Kurdish communities in France originate from Iraq, Iran, and Syria (Kurdish Institute, 2016).

The organisation of diaspora communities is also characterised by transnational social relations (Wahlbeck, 1999). The Kurdish diaspora in Europe is highly organized. In addition to familial ties and networks, Kurdish diaspora communities over time have created non-territory-based networks and contacts, and established political, cultural, social, and educational organisations and institutions—among which is FEYKA-France (the Federation of Kurdish Associations in France) consisting of about twenty associations (Dryaz, 2015). The social and transnational space in the context of diaspora movements can offer, assign value to, and devalue collective (identity) narratives for diaspora members and possibly inform them about linguistic and cultural matters related to the “homeland” (Cohen, 2008), a case in point with the second generation of Kurdish parentage (Baser, 2015; Toivanen, 2014). Not only does the Kurdish second generation have access to diaspora networks, organizations, and transnational social relations, but their motivation to engage transnationally can also be shaped by the fact that they are embedded in the transnational space of an ethno-national and exiled diaspora community.

#### 4. Methods

The data used in this study consists of 25 qualitative interviews conducted with second-generation Kurds in France (2016–2018) as well as of observation data collected during various events. Participants’ families belong to the migration wave from Turkey (one participant’s parents had migrated from Iraq) starting from the 1980s. Most participants were born in France, and few arrived in the country as small children. As Khayati (2008, p. 143) notes, the Kurds arriving in the 1980s constituted the first refugee generation in the country and had “a good level of intellectual capital and political awareness.” The interviewees’ educational background varied considerably (from high school to MA degrees), and some of them were students, while others had already entered the work force. Overall, the majority had or were in the process of completing a university-level degree. Women and men represented an equal share of the participants, and they were between 20 and 30 years old. The participants were recruited by using the snowballing method and through key contacts in the community. I was able to gain access to the field and find research participants relatively easily as my positionality was constructed as a “neutral” outsider to the Kurdish community. Researcher positionality and how that potentially affected the data collection

and knowledge production is discussed in more detail in Baser and Toivanen (2016), highlighting significant differences in researcher positionality based on “ethnicity” and national background (Turkish vs. Finnish).

The interviews were conducted in a confidential manner and all data were anonymized. The names provided are pseudonyms. Some identifiable features have been slightly modified for the purposes of anonymity. The data were analysed with content analysis (Ruusuvaari, Nikander, & Hyvärinen, 2019), with the focus being on participants’ networks, practices, and mobilities. To illustrate the diversity of experiences, yet at the same time to highlight the similarities in research participants’ narrations, I have focused on three cases that in their own way are reflective of the overall dataset.

#### 5. Embedded in a Transnational Space: Networks, Practices, and Mobilities

The participants in this study had been raised in a transnational space, taking part in networks, practices, and mobilities of a cross-border character. Their transnational networks could be divided into informal, less institutionalized ties and to formal, more institutionalized ties. The informal ties and networks were kinship ties to the (extended) family in the homeland and in the diaspora. The networks of family members (often grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.) in the homeland were maintained through communication and visits.

The formal and more institutional ties in the transnational space were through both diaspora and “non-diaspora” organisations (student associations, leftist groups). One example of a formal network that extended to the transnational diaspora space was the one created through the collaboration between Ambition Kurde, an association established by second-generation Kurds in Paris, and the Kurdish-European Society, based in Brussels. Following the Syrian civil war and the political unrest in the Kurdish regions in Turkey, numerous seminars, discussion events, and demonstrations were organised by student associations and leftist organisations in Paris, and in collaboration with the diaspora organisations to raise awareness of the on-going situation. One of the interviewees, Azad, explained how creating links and networks in France could eventually be useful for the reconstruction of the largely destroyed Kurdish city in Syria:

Because the links we foster here are beneficial to better understand the society back there. The relations that we create here, they are as important, to facilitate activities, projects....For instance, it’s quite simple, but the construction of Kobane, it’s about the money, and one needs to find it, so we can create relations with the municipalities, projects that aim to it.

Olwig (2007) conceptualizes the second generation’s transnational context as fields of relations that includes

both local and transnational social relationships. The distinction between local and transnational (or inter/intra-ethnic) networks and ties is not always clear-cut, as illustrated by the above example, but very much reflective of the lived experiences of the second generation. This also means acknowledging that local and transnational networks can affect and shape one another (Ryan et al., 2015).

Both informal and formal networks that evoked a diasporic bond were mobilised for a variety of political, cultural, social, and economic practices that took place locally as well as in the transnational space. Such practices included participation in election delegations in Turkey, in political demonstrations in Paris, in sending donations to the region (namely to Syria), taking part in humanitarian campaigns, taking part in cultural production (translation, Kurdish film festivals, language education, etc.) as well as in discussion events, seminars, awareness raising campaigns, and so forth. Furthermore, these also included practices such as initiating study exchanges, internships, and short-term employments to gain educational and professional advantages. The practices the participants engaged in and social resources they mobilised through their networks were transnational also in the sense that they were not limited to those between France and Kurdistan. In addition, they extended in a broader manner to the transnational diaspora space. These practices took place both in online and “offline” spaces, and transnationally with other members of diaspora communities and associations elsewhere.

The transnational social space also shaped second-generation members’ mobilities. This was most evident in how they had visited the sending region and the family left behind, in most cases throughout their childhood and adolescent years and all the way to adulthood. Frequent visits to their parents’ city or town of origin and summers spent in the “homeland” helped to maintain close relations to family members, and in some cases also enabled completing student exchange programs or internships in the region of Kurdistan or in Turkey. Informal networks via extended kinship ties in the diaspora were used for mobilities, as in the case of Serkar who mobilised such networks for educational purposes:

So even if it’s not close family members, you can always find somebody in another country....When I left for Canada, I needed a place to stay. So, I stayed with people who were close to my grandparents. I contacted them and stayed at their place for five months. Then I decided to go to Toronto, and found somebody else there, and I didn’t know these people. Now they are very close.

Overall, the transnational space and the Kurdish diaspora networks, both informal and formal, were relied upon when travelling to other countries, either for leisure, but also for professional and educational purposes. The transnational social relations and networks based on di-

asporic bonds enabled second-generation members to engage in transnational practices and mobilities.

## 6. Biographical Case Studies

The following section contains three biographical cases that illustrate the extent to which transnational networks and ties represent a mobilisable social resource for the second generation, and whether they capitalise upon such resources. The first two cases show how Rojda and Zilan have successfully mobilised their transnational networks for educational and professional gains. The third case shows how Fero, conscious of the potential his transnational ties entails, intends to mobilise his resources in the near future for his professional aspirations. I will then discuss the extent to which these resources, realised or to be realised, can be considered to constitute migrant capital.

### 6.1. Rojda

Rojda’s father arrived in France in the 1980s, during the turbulent political times in Turkey’s history, and in the following years, he met Rojda’s mother. Rojda was born in the early 1990s, and her siblings some years later. The family spoke Kurdish at home, and she improved her Kurdish through family visits to the region. At an adult age, she had an idea of translating Kurdish songs (in Kurmanji) into French. She translated dozens of songs, out of which around some twenty were published in print. I met Rojda during a political demonstration that grouped several associations, including some Kurdish ones. She was selling the book of translated songs with her mother.

She also spent two months in a Kurdish city in Turkey, right before the violent conflict broke out in 2015. Supported by her family networks, she completed an internship at the local university, which also enabled her to visit a local institution relevant to her field of study. Indeed, one of her teachers had initiated a study exchange program between the Kurdish city and Paris, which is why she left to find out how it could be further institutionalized and made official. During her trip, she became better acquainted with the local associations and maintained contact with them afterwards:

In [Kurdish city], I met with associations that are well-made, independent of any party politics, Kurdish, neutral, student associations....They organize humanitarian trips and they were doing that there, in hidden. So, I told myself, if they manage to do it there, risking their lives, whereas I don’t risk anything in Paris, I really have to do it now. That pushed me to create the association faster, when I came back from [Kurdish city].

Her trip to Turkey prompted her to create an association for young Kurds, mainly consisting of members of the second generation. It had objectives and a wide scope of activities that had both local and transnational charac-

ters. One of them was to provide aid to young (second-generation) Kurds in France and to promote their educational paths through one-to-one support system (*système de parrainage*) and to provide support to arriving Kurdish students. In other words, the association operated as a platform for young Kurds to accumulate educational advantages and to establish social relations that could potentially be mobilised at a later instance. Concerning the students, who wished to arrive to Europe, she explained how she had helped them to find internship programs and put them in contact with relevant people. At the same time, this had enabled her to become acquainted with a wider network of contacts. Indeed, her local and transnational networks were not clearly distinguishable from one another, and they were neither uniquely “ethnic” networks, although they did evoke a diasporic connection.

Her association was explicitly founded on non-political grounds. It also had a humanitarian goal that was initiated with the translated book of songs. Rojda decided to dedicate half of the profits gained from the book sales towards a reconstruction of a school in a city located in the Kurdish region in Syria:

I’m in the process of creating an association to promote the education of young Kurds in France, that of young Kurds who arrive from Kurdistan and those in Kurdistan. It’s in three parts. So, with my book, I decided to renounce my author’s rights so that half of the gains go towards the construction of a school in [city in Northern Syria]. It was the philosophy of the author I translated, it was somebody who supported children’s and youths’ education, so I wanted to continue his work.

Rojda had previous kinship ties to this particular Kurdish region which she managed to mobilise successfully alongside her initial contacts to the local institution, thus allowing her to complete the internship. What is particularly noteworthy is that the mobilisation of her mostly informal transnational networks led to the creation of new, more formalized link between Turkey and France. Also, her previous cultural capital (education and language skills) was of use when creating new networks in the Kurdish region, in other words when accessing the local professional milieu. This also contributed to the completion of her internship in Kurdistan, which then became an addition to her professional expertise on return and enabled to her to leave to North America to complete another internship. Indeed, her case shows how the accumulation of capital in the transnational space does not follow linear trajectories but entails building and transferring capital in/to new places (Erel & Ryan, 2019).

## 6.2. Zilan

Zilan’s father arrived in France in the 1980s, and the rest of the family followed him some years later, including

Zilan, who was four at the time and met her father for the first time. Zilan’s father knew people in France, which had affected his choice of moving to France and eventually also facilitated his settlement to the country. The family did not visit Kurdistan every year, since they encountered trouble travelling safely. They only visited Kurdistan with the entire family twice. Zilan tells how she spent a lot of time with her grandparents in Turkey and how she retains close connection, calling them every weekend. At home, the family spoke Kurdish, but the parents emphasised that the children had to learn perfect French at school. She was also immersed in the Turkish language at home via television. As for her transnational connections, Zilan had some extended family in Germany and in the UK but most of the family was living in Turkey.

One of Zilan’s main goals was to graduate from the prestigious university she was enrolled in in Paris, which she finally did. However, her interest in going to the Kurdish region had been “dormant.” It was only when she was assigned to do a presentation on a Kurdish-related topic at school that her interest in the region became animated. This was followed by an exchange year in Istanbul. In fact, she had taken advantage of her kinship ties to be able to stay with her aunts and cousins in Istanbul and to complete a prestigious stay at the local university. She was also able to use her language skills in Turkish, although she felt that the cultural differences between France and Turkey were quite significant and that it would be difficult for her to settle there:

Yes, I have grandparents, cousins, aunts, one in Istanbul, one uncle in London, family in every city in Turkey....We often visited our cousins in Germany. I did my internship in Istanbul and I stayed with my aunt, then as roommates with my cousin.

During the next stage of her studies, she decided to leave to Erbil, the “capital” of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to conduct a two-month internship and to network with local professionals. She tells how being of Kurdish background had meant that she was received well, but she had struggled with the language, as a different Kurdish dialect was spoken in the region compared to the one her parents had spoken with her. In that sense, her cultural capital was not directly and entirely transferable to the new context (Erel, 2010), but the experience enabled her to acquire new cultural capital. Considering her research and graduation as one of her biggest projects, she reflects on her motivations to study.

There are two aspects in making it, and in the way others see you. For the French professors, you had to be excellent at school, to show that even if we are foreigners, you are good. And there’s the Kurdish aspect. There are these two aspects that are mixed up....You have fled and you have been told that you don’t exist. So, it’s also to show that Kurds can exist and that they can make it. Because you don’t realize to what

extent it's destructive to be told that you don't exist, that you cannot speak Kurdish. I left at the age of four, so I haven't really lived there. But it is as if I had. So, it's very hard to fight against that every day and I think that all the scholarly achievements, integration, it helps you to say that you made it.

Zilan's account poignantly describes the significance of the transnational space of diaspora community and how that has affected her life choices in terms of education. She relates the fact of pushing herself forward towards different accomplishments to her "diasporic" past and to the fact of being of Kurdish background, of belonging to an ethno-national people that has struggled for recognition. Like Rojda, Zilan had managed to mobilise her transnational networks and capitalise on them to her educational and professional advantage. In the process, she managed to create new professional networks in the region. Her experiences in Istanbul and Erbil enabled her also to gain more cultural capital (in form of new, improved language skills, for instance).

Another goal she had for the future was to establish a cultural space for young Kurds in Kurdistan, with a similar space opened in Paris. She envisioned that she could potentially mobilise the social relations she had through kinship and the professional ties both to the Kurdish region and in Paris for future, transnational projects. As in the case of Rojda, who accumulated professional experience in Kurdistan enabling her to be mobile towards North America, Zilan's example also points towards the accumulation of different sets of resources in the transnational space via the capitalisation of her transnational kinship networks. It also shows the potential of such resources to be utilised and capitalised on for future transnational projects (Erel, 2010; Ryan et al., 2015).

### 6.3. Fero

Differently from Zilan and Rojda, Fero's family moved from Iraqi Kurdistan to France in the late 1980s. His parents had visited the region several times after their departure, but he had only returned to Iraqi Kurdistan twice, the latter time being at the age of five. He had grown up speaking Kurdish with his grandfather and both French and Kurdish with his parents, although he was not satisfied with his level of Kurdish. Indeed, in order to encourage second-generation children to speak Kurdish, he had created Kurdish language course with his aunt. He explained about the difficulties in transmitting the Kurdish culture and acknowledged the importance diaspora associations could play in this regard. Now the second generation, according to him, aimed to organise things differently from the first generation. The activities were more locally orientated, although they did have the reference to a diasporic bond. He considered that networking among the second-generation members was of importance, referring to other diaspora communities he considered successful in this regard:

In Paris, for instance, I try to meet up with young people belonging to the second generation like myself, who have studied and who work, in order to be able to organize professional networks. A bit like the Jewish people have done, or the Armenians.

Fero recognises the importance of local networks in France for educational and professional advancement, and how the lack of those has had an impact on second-generation members like himself. He explains how it has been frustrating not to possess the same networks in France as his fellow students or colleagues, and that this has made it complicated to find an internship in a law firm. This is like Cederberg's (2012) observations on the obstacles that migrants might encounter when creating contacts with the majority population, and in this case, as Fero's account shows, extends to the second generation. Instead, Fero's aims to create localized networks with second-generation members shows how he aims to tap into his existing networks in the diaspora space for professional advantage. This also resonates with Cederberg's findings on the significance of co-ethnic networks and how social networks and resources in terms of capital are also structured according to majority-minority relations.

Fero also acknowledges the importance of having transnational connections and networks between France and Kurdistan. He is thinking of spending some months in Iraqi Kurdistan for work in order to improve his Kurdish language skills. For him, this was an issue of personal importance. He describes how his language skills would eventually allow him to work in Iraqi Kurdistan, and how capitalising on such transnational connections would also be beneficial for his professional career in the long run. Regarding this, he situates himself within the larger Kurdish diaspora community that has the potential to operate as a bridge between France and Kurdistan. In other words, he does not consider the transnational networks that he has access to (merely) as individual social resources, but as more collective ones that the Kurdish diaspora beholds:

Today we are Kurds. We are the bridge between Iraqi Kurdistan and France. Tomorrow when Daesh won't exist anymore, economy will take on and we can be the bridge between the French and the Kurdish societies, why not? I think that economically speaking, the French are very pleased to have the Kurds who speak Kurdish and who can help them to set up stuff there.

Erel and Ryan (2019, p. 2) suggest paying attention to the spatial and temporal dimensions of migrant capital, to understand better the "ebbs and flows in the valorization of migrants' resources through space and time." Whereas Rojda's and Zilan's examples illustrated the spatial dynamics of capital in the transnational space, Fero's example also points towards its temporal aspects:

I would love to open a school in Kurdistan and to teach in the French way. I really like my current job because I think that I could have opportunities to go and work in Kurdistan. I'll be in contact with some people next year to see if there's a possibility to work there.

Indeed, he envisions mobilising and capitalising on his transnational connections and transferring his skills and know-how by eventually moving to the region. The motivation to move there, even if temporarily, stems from his wish to contribute towards the development of Kurdistan, showing again the significance of being raised in a transnational diaspora space. However, in addition to this, it is also accompanied by a desire for professional advancement as he considers the region to have increasing economic significance, which would mean that his cultural capital could become valorised differently in future (Erel & Ryan, 2019). However, the political instability in the region has prompted him to postpone his plans for the near future. Fero's account differs also from Zilan's and Rojda's accounts in the way that his mobilisable networks are not necessarily kinship-based but are through professional contacts to the region. The context of the sending region, for instance in form of the security situation, also shapes how kinship or other networks can be safely mobilised to fulfil educational, professional or other objectives. Also, Fero's account shows how he has mobilized his networks in the diaspora space in a local manner, whereas the networks of local native youth have been closed to him.

## 7. Discussion

Second-generation Kurds have been raised in a transnational space meaning that their lived experiences are characterised by transnational networks, practices, and mobilities. Their transnational networks were formal or informal, transnational (kinship ties in Kurdistan) or more local (second-generation networks in Paris). They had mobilised and capitalised on them to gain access to internships, study programs and associative work. The first transnational networks to be mobilized were based on informal kinship ties. However, it is noteworthy that these enabled the creation of professional networks in the Kurdish region and led to the acquisition of new social and cultural capital thereafter (Erel, 2010) that were employed for professional advantage. Indeed, the findings from this study illustrate second-generation members' agency to mobilise and capitalise on such resources that exist in their transnational networks and ties (see Ryan et al., 2015; Shah, 2007). Whereas the second-generation members did not necessarily possess (local) social capital like their fellow students and colleagues of French parentage, they were aware of the opportunities embedded in transnational networks and connections between France, Kurdistan, and Kurdish diaspora communities elsewhere.

Such networks were not uniquely "ethnic" nor transnational, but they contained a diasporic dimension

in the sense that they were the result of the second-generation members having been raised in a transnational diaspora space. Furthermore, the mobilisation of transnational networks was motivated by a wish to contribute towards the development of Kurdistan, in addition to personal educational and professional ambitions. The statelessness of the Kurdish nation and the political mobilisation of the Kurdish diaspora potentially contribute to the diaspora taking a more active part in homeland development than would be the case with other diaspora groups. A similar case has been found among the Tamil diaspora in Switzerland, for instance, where the ethno-national struggles for greater autonomy in the homeland and the state repression following it has mobilised both the first and second-generation members (Hess & Korf, 2014). Also, as a case-specific observation, it needs to be mentioned that such resources are perhaps more mobilisable for some diaspora groups than others. The Kurdish diaspora is highly organised in terms of associations, cultural centres, and media outlets. Also, the Kurdish diaspora originates from Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria, and instead of being situated between a specific sending or receiving state, its communities (and their networks) extend across the globe.

Migrant capital was earlier defined as mobilisable social resources that are available as a result of the migration process. By extension, I argue that migrant capital can also encompass social resources that are available for and mobilisable by second-generation Kurds as a result of their parents' migration process and specifically, as a result of them having been raised in a transnational diaspora space. These social resources exist in second-generation members' transnational networks and ties, mostly informal rather than formal, and they have the potential to be mobilised and converted to accumulate educational and professional advantages. Therefore, in addition to focusing on social capital in second-generation's "ethnic" and "non-ethnic" networks, in this article the need for more research on how the second generation mobilises and capitalises upon its transnational networks is highlighted. Also, how social capital embedded in transnational networks can be converted to other forms of capital and what spatial and temporal dynamics are at play in the accumulation of migrant capital in the transnational space deserves more attention.

## 8. Conclusion

Whereas previous research has shown that transnational networks can become a social resource for migrant communities (Faist, 2000a, 2000b; Ryan et al., 2008, 2015), little is known about how the second generation mobilises and capitalises on their transnational networks. Instead, focus in earlier research regarding the second generation had been on their "ethnic" or "non-ethnic" networks and the social capital such networks entail. Yet, transnational ties and networks persist among the second generation, although the character of transnational networks and



ties might differ from those of their parents (Kasinitz et al., 2008; Levitt, 2009; Levitt & Waters, 2002). This study set out to consider the transnational ties, practices, and mobilities of second-generation Kurds in France, drawn from a qualitative dataset (interviews, observation). It examined the extent to which the second generation mobilises and capitalises on its transnational networks, and extent social resources embedded in their transnational networks can be considered as migrant capital. It showed that the second-generation Kurds have been raised in a transnational diaspora space, entailing cross-border contacts, networks, practices, and mobilities between France and Kurdistan and to diaspora networks elsewhere. Second-generation members mobilised mostly pre-existing kinship networks for two closely interrelated reasons: to advance one's educational and professional advantages and to contribute towards the development of Kurdistan. The conclusion from the study is that social resources mobilised by second-generation members (namely their transnational networks) can be understood as a form of migrant capital that has become available to them as a result of their parents' migration and as a result of them having been raised in the transnational diaspora space. More empirical research is needed on how the second generation mobilises social resources embedded in their transnational networks, what motivates the second generation to capitalise on them and whether these social resources can be converted to other forms of capital depending on the spatial and temporal contexts.

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### Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflicts of interests.

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